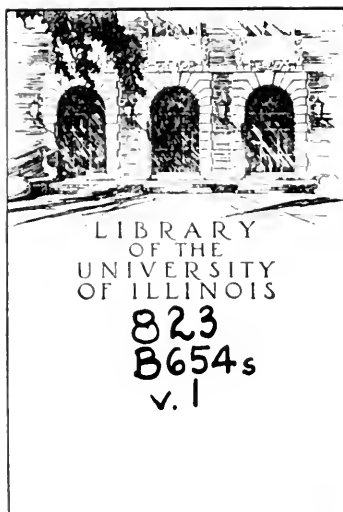


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Wennington Hall.





STRONG HANDS

AND

STEADFAST HEARTS.

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STRONG HANDS
AND
STEADFAST HEARTS.

BY THE
COUNTESS VON BOTHMER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
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ONE

WHOSE HANDS WERE HELPFUL

AND

WHOSE HEART WAS STRONG.

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STRONG HANDS

AND

STEADFAST HEARTS.



CHAPTER I.

THE QUOIT-THROWER.

LONDON was at its dullest, and that is saying a good deal. The polite world had forsaken the parks; the Serpentine was a sea of mist and fog; in Kensington Gardens the bare branches were dripping hopelessly on the deserted pathways; and only policemen, cabs, and milkmen were to be seen in those regions where the shops left off, and local habitations began to take the place of names. London in November has been immortalised

by so many pens, so eloquently described by so many unfortunate foreigners whom the Fates, or an unsympathetic government, or a revolution, or an ungrateful country, or a spirit of research, or the ardent desire to spread their native tongue over the earth, or one of those thousand-and-one nameless necessities which know no law, has brought to town when every one else was out of it,—that I shall neither swell the army of critics, nor attempt a vindication of the autumnal charms of our modern Babylon. Frenchmen have abused and Italians reviled it, whilst our cousins German have grown prolix on the subject; and although I might indeed without any special valour attempt to “whitewash” the old city—for “whitewashing” is a grand feature of the age—(Nero is an amiable youth; Messalina all things that are lovely and of good report; Henry the Fifth a model young man, and Richard the Third an enterprising genius, according to modern

historians)—yet I will refrain from any such vindication. Mr. Bull thinks his big town not only the biggest, but the most beautiful, convenient, grand, luxurious, refined, and enlightened of cities; full of sunshine and cheerfulness, and omnibuses and shoeblacks, and beer and beef and mutton; and what can a Briton—or in fact any other man—want more?

Let envious foreigners say what they will—what can you expect of a foreigner but prejudice and absurdity?—But for all that, and in spite of the archest British Philistine, I must repeat again that London was at its dullest and dreariest. So dull and so dreary that no one would willingly have gone forth who could stay at home. In a word, the weather was abominable. It had been raining all the morning, as it had been raining on every preceding morning for the space of four weeks; and now in the afternoon, although the rain had ceased, it was so dark, that persons

indoors might well have imagined it to be raining kittens and pelting puppy-dogs ; the streets were full of greasy black mud, and the gas-lights were already burning in some of the shops, although it was not much past three o'clock.

A girl, sitting before an easel, looked anxiously up at the skylight in the Græco-Roman saloon of the British Museum. She passed her hands quickly across her face, sighed, stood up, stretched out her arms as though they were cramped, and then, with another sigh, sat down again.

She was copying that wonderful statue of the Quoit-thrower, which is so instinct with life and with the "poetry of motion," that one almost expects the metal to fly out of the young athlete's hand and fall with a clanging ring upon the pavement. The beautiful resolute face, the firmly compressed lips, the determined but harmonious chin, the proud delicate nose, the energy and purpose of the whole face and

figure were admirably given again in her spirited yet patiently worked-out copy. But she sighed again as she sat down. For a moment the ghost of a smile followed the sigh, and the transitory gleam of light in her eyes told what such a face *might* be when only the reflex of a joyous heart. But in the poor girl's heart there was no joy, and therefore in her face there could also be none; but rather a settled sadness which struck one strangely, and jarred upon one "like sweet bells jangled out of tune." Such a face ought to have been wreathed in smiles like that of Aurora or Hebe, not clouded with a veil of grief, not paled by sorrow, nor made wan by care. The shades of evening were creeping on; the more delicate part of her work had to be abandoned; yet still she worked on, patiently, conscientiously, and with a perseverance that ignored the weariness of the delicate body, and laboured as though life were nothing else but labour.

Shall I tell you what she was like, this patient, sorrowful girl, this toiler of the millions? Yes, I will tell you; but when I have done so, then invest her with a thousand touching graces, a thousand nameless charms, and the picture will be still imperfect.

She was tall and slight; not over tall, but of that gracious height which conveys dignity without detracting from womanliness. An artist would have divined full harmonious forms beneath her loose dress; her head was set upon her shoulders so gracefully, and the line of the bust and shoulders was so beautiful, that a trifle more fulness would have ripened them into perfect beauty itself. Her face was a remarkable one. The hair, jet black and abundant, was drawn off the temples, and rolled up in massive coils at the back of the perfectly shaped head; the face was of that pure oval which is apt to have angular lines about the brow and chin when sick-

ness or sorrow comes to set their seal on beauty. There was already a slight sharpness of outline in the contour of this face, which when seen *en profile* suggested fastings and watchings, and an early acquaintance with grief. The mouth was full, and the lips of a rich rosy red; otherwise the face was totally devoid of colour, but of that clear transparent paleness which flashes into brilliant beauty when any strong emotion stirs the heart. The nose was well-formed, slightly aquiline, and delicately cut about the nostrils.

But the eyes—what shall I say of the eyes? Were they beautiful, or cruel, or terrible? were they loving, or eager and fierce? Just now they were none of these things; they were simply pale, clear, blue-grey eyes, looking at the statue before them with an expressionless, patient perseverance that became a trifle more eager as the afternoon darkened. The lashes round them were very thick, long, and black,

but for all that the eyes looked cold and stony, and as though they were too shallow for any intense expression.

As for the girl's dress, it was of the simplest. It would have been mean and shabby on any other woman; on her it seemed only modest and unpretending. The long lines of her draperies gave height to her figure; and when she rose and stretched her arms, it might have been seen that, despite the reign of steel, she wore no crinoline, and that though slight, she was strong and lithe.

Hers was a face that every more intelligent passer-by would have looked at, but having so looked twice or thrice, would have turned away from, with a feeling of disappointment, and but for some slight peculiarity in the cut, shape, and colour of the eyes, would soon have forgotten. Perhaps, after all, the most remarkable thing about the face was its utter nullity. It was totally void. I cannot assert that it

was “faultily faultless” or “icily regular ;” but it was in truth “splendidly null.” It was a beautiful mask, nothing more.





CHAPTER II.

“INTO EACH LIFE SOME RAIN MUST FALL.”

EVEN the windows of the Rag and Fanish were dull. At least, so thought Lieutenant Holsters of Her Majesty's —th Lancers, as he looked out of the club-windows and reflectively caressed his moustache. I never heard that little Holsters was specially affectionate in the bosom of his family ; but the devotion which he bestowed upon that modest little sandy adornment of his was something positively incredible. The poor little fellow's mind was more than usually vacant, and he was wishing that the night would come ; wishing that he knew how to kill time ; wishing that he

knew what to have for dinner; wishing that he had no debts, and that he could grow two inches (for the heels of his boots were already a standing joke in the regiment); wishing, probably, a thousand and one little delusive personal wishes totally beyond the pale of realisation. He had got leave, and had come up to town, but there his career seemed likely to end for the present. His parents and sisters were abroad, and as his own funds were not exactly in the condition of a green bay-tree, his movements were somewhat restricted; for it requires coin to travel by rail, or indeed to go about much in cabs and omnibuses, though into the last-named conveyance nothing would have induced Lieutenant Holsters to enter. He knew too well what was due to himself and to the gallant —th; and he would have preferred death to disgrace, especially to such an indelible disgrace as that. So little Holsters kept pretty much to the

distances that he could traverse on foot, and only went home to the big family mansion in Portland-place to sleep at night, because his finances did not favour bachelor apartments, or a room at an hotel. I believe the poor little fellow was half afraid of going up the big empty uncarpeted staircase at night, and past all the silent rooms alone; and that he looked lingeringly over the bannisters at old Truman's (the butler's) bald head, illumined by the light of a solitary tallow-candle, with a longing for companionship savouring more of nursery days (or nights) than of the mess-room and barrack-yard.

Why Lieutenant Holsters had left the charming little country town in which he was quartered was best known to himself. Had he made too fierce love to the “young lady” at the pastry-cook's, or had some rival beauty reproached him with his faithlessness? Was he in want of money, or of credit? or had he come to town in the

fond anticipation of finding his beloved parents and amiable sisters once more at home, and the Lares and Penates set up again for a permanency? If so, he was disappointed; for not only were the household gods not set up, but the carpets were as yet not laid down, nor did curtains drape the windows, nor were the bags taken off the furniture. Now, as he stood looking out of the club-windows, he felt very disconsolate, and almost wished himself back at Y——, killing time and the young lady behind the counter at one blow. What was he to do with himself? To dine alone, and then go alone to the theatre, was not an arrangement quite to his taste; but he knew of no better programme for the evening. He was just making up his mind as to which temple of the Muses he should honour with his presence, when a vision of something (or somebody), in the street caused him to utter an exclamation of surprise, and to leave for a moment that occu-

pation which appeared to be a balm for all sorrows and a solace in all misfortunes.

“ Couldn’t believe my eyes, you know,” he said, as he passed his arm into that of a young man who had just come out of the Exclusive, and was walking soberly towards St. James’s-street.

“ Ought only to believe *half* that you see,” replied his friend, without the slightest appearance of surprise or pleasure at the little Lieutenant’s sudden greeting.

“ O, of course ; but I thought you were somewhere in Germany, or Russia, or Turkey, or one of those places ; I heard Stanley saying so the other day.”

“ Never believe *anything* that you hear,” interrupted his friend.

“ Of course not ; but why didn’t you stay in your last place ?”

“ Dismissed with a month’s wages,” said the elder of the two, in answer to the Lieutenant’s artless inquiries.

“ Don’t chaff, but tell me the real story.”

"The real story is not much to tell: I only got a month's wages (nothing for board or keep), and have had to come home at my own expense. That is how talent is encouraged and genius rewarded in this benighted country."

"I suppose you got into debt?"

"Yes; but that was only a detail, and had nothing to do with it."

"Well, then, why have you come home?"

"Well, because I ventured to blow my nose in the presence of his Serene Highness the Duke of Saxe-Pumpenheim, and incautiously observed to the dowager Duchess that I considered the climate detestable."

"Of course you are laughing at me; but never mind; I know you diplomatic fellows never give the right answer to anything. But will you dine with me?"

"Willingly," said Mildmay; and then the two young men walked on in silence.

"Where are you going?" asked little

Holsters presently ; for his boots were very tight, and his companion's legs appeared uncommonly long.

"To pay my respects to the ancients, and to leave my card on Teutamus the Twenty-third, King of Nineveh, as also to all his satraps and human-headed bulls. In plain English, I have promised an old friend of mine in Germany to hunt-up one or two inscriptions for him ; and as I have the whole thing, into which I am instructed to inquire, written down, am now going to see about the legends in question ; though I confess, in entering the great gilded gates I leave all hope behind."

This was not very intelligible talk, but still it *was* talk ; and so little Holsters grinned, and looking as wise as he could, tried to keep up with his friend and bear it.

Presently they entered the old "Catholic dome in Bloomsbury," of which our greatest humorist has written such loving words.

"Queer sort of a place, this," said little

Holsters to himself; but he kept quiet, and, on the whole, was rather impressed. He thought it was a chapel perhaps, or a congregation of chapels, that he was being taken to; he didn't approve of the style of architecture for ecclesiastical purposes (when in town, he always went to All Saints', Margaret-street); nor were the vergers, with their wands, exactly to his liking; but he discreetly held his peace, and followed his friend. An agreeable warmth pervaded the building, and the matting was pleasant to his poor feet, after the greasy mud of the streets. They had walked all the way; for Mildmay declared he was too hard-up to pay for a hansom (he weighed twelve stone eight, and was afraid of getting stout); and Holsters had registered a vow in heaven never to enter an omnibus; so they had no choice but to walk; and thus the little Lieutenant was very tired, and had long since ceased to prattle by the way.

“ Now we are here,” said Mildmay, having procured the information he desired for his friend the German *savant*,—“ now we *are* here, we may as well improve the shining hour, and look round the old bar-rack.”

“ I wonder what place this really is ?” thought little Holtsters, but he said not a word, and submissively followed his friend. There had been some slight delay in acquiring the needful information, but it had finally been procured ; and Mildmay, with the inscription and dates in his pocket, turned into the Roman saloon.

The young girl who was copying the quoit-thrower, was putting away her drawings. She stood with her face turned away from the statue, and did not observe the two young men, who paused for a moment to admire that work of art. As she turned, however, she became aware of them. Not the least discomposed, she proceeded with her work, and did not remark that their

eyes had wandered from Art to Nature, from the statue to herself, from the dead stone to the living flesh. It was now almost too dark to distinguish more than the outlines of the figures posted at regular intervals down the long gallery where they stood, but the light was sufficient to show the noble contour of the young girl's head, and the harmonious proportions of her figure as she stooped to take her drawing-materials from a chair and threw a long dark mantle round her shoulders. They were both gentlemen, and they passed on, neither staring nor lingering in her way. When they were fairly out of sight, she looked cautiously round. All was silent, and not even a footfall resounded through the now nearly empty galleries. Then she crossed the vestibule, and standing close up against the pedestal, looked into the beautiful resolute face of the athlete. A marvellous change came over her countenance. It was as though she were going to press

the full red lips upon the marble ; a slight flush passed over her cheek, and her eyes—those strange cold blue eyes—became bright and deep and liquid ; then the colour faded away, the lips relaxed, the light died out of her eyes, a tear trickled over her cheeks, and she sighed again, more heavily and deeply than she had done before, and glided away into the darkness. It was four o'clock, and a number of people were streaming out of the huge building. At the top of the steps, beneath the portico, stood the two friends. It was raining again, and they were debating as to their movements.

“It's beastly wet,” said Holsters, “and most infernally dirty.”

“It might be drier, certainly, and I don't quite see that it could well be much dirtier,” assented his friend. Just then a tall figure in a dark cloak passed them ; there was a moment's pause, during which the girl gathered up her dress before descending into the sea of mud and wet that lay spread

out beneath her. She had no umbrella; but she passed swiftly out into the rain, and was gone. It was against Mildmay's creed to see a woman (and especially a young and beautiful woman) wet to the skin, whilst he went dry. He ran after her, and taking off his hat: "Pray allow me to offer you my umbrella," he said, "for I see you have come out without one; or shall I call a cab for you?" The porters and men about the place knew better than that: *they* had not offered to fetch her a cab; *they* knew how poor she was, and that for her even an omnibus was an unattainable luxury.

Mildmay knew none of these things; he saw that she was young, beautiful, and graceful; a woman, alone, and in need of assistance. The plainness of her dress had not even specially struck him; and now that he stood in the rain, offering her his umbrella, he was not conscious that she differed from other ladies, but for a certain indefinable nobility of aspect, that indescribable

air noble which can afford to set fashion at defiance, and to wear shabby dresses with something approaching to impunity. Many a girl would have been frightened or surprised by the suddenness of Mildmay's address, gentle and respectful though it was. Grace Hepburn was neither startled nor discomposed. "Thank you; I do not mind the rain," she said simply; "besides, I have not far to go, and could not think of taking your umbrella, for I have no means of returning it." "I could call for it," suggested Mildmay, "or you could send it to my club by a servant." At the words, "or you could send it to my club by a servant," a slight smile gleamed for a moment over the girl's face, and then, with something like amusement in her tone, she said: "Thank you; I have no servant to send; we are poor people. But I cannot let you stand in the rain; I am very much obliged to you"—and she walked on. Still Mildmay kept up with her. She was not the least ner-

vous or shy, this young girl; and he was so courteous that even had she been so, his manner must have reassured her. He still walked by her side, holding the umbrella over her. She, apparently unconscious that he was doing anything out of the way, against the *convenances*, or in any wise improper; he, grave and polite, and evidently also under the impression that he was doing nothing more than his duty. Seeing this, she walked steadily on; not altogether sorry, perhaps, for the shelter,—for who could say that she would find a fire whereby to dry her wet garments on her arrival at home? Thus they passed through two or three great gloomy squares of that Mesopotamian region, across a street or two, and then, turning suddenly to the left, Mildmay found himself standing before a small house in a crescent of other small houses, with a horrid little garden in front, all melancholy, with bare branches and leafless trees. "Thank you, you are very good," she said

simply, as she turned the handle of the door; “but I will not keep you in the rain; thank you”—and she went into the little house, shutting the door behind her upon the chivalrous Mildmay. He walked away again in a puzzled frame of mind. The girl had roused his curiosity. How strange her absence of shyness was! and yet, he felt, this very absence of apprehension, this utter want of self-consciousness, had stood her, and must often stand her, in good stead. He felt how impossible it would be to address any of those idle flatteries, or foolish innuendoes, so generally supposed (by men) to be agreeable to the female mind, to such a woman as this. He felt that he should like to know all about her. Was she married? Was she single? She had a composure of manner, a calm assurance, which did not seem of right to belong to a young unmarried girl. Why did she live in such a shabby house? Why did she walk through the rain? Why did no

one come to fetch her? and why did she go to that melancholy place at all? She had been drawing; yes, he had seen that; and he had been struck by her beauty and grace as she stood putting up her drawing-materials; for aught he then knew, she might be some spoilt darling, following a freak of fancy in coming to the "old barrack," as he had irreverently called it; fancying herself an artist, and deluding herself with the delightful idea of possessing "the divine spark." Mildmay had seen that the house into which she had disappeared was shabby, but he had not remarked that her dress was still more so. He had only seen that beauty and grace were hers in an uncommon degree; and now it struck him strangely and unpleasantly that all her surroundings were not beautiful and graceful also.

Pondering still over the matter, he reached the club (for he knew it would be useless returning to the Museum for Hols-

ters), and found his little friend famished, and waiting dinner for him.

Nothing was said between the young men about Mildmay's erratic course Pall-Mall-wards till just as they were setting off to the theatre.

“Where did she live, Mildmay?” asked little Holsters abruptly.

“Who?”

“Why, that young woman you took home this afternoon.”

“I don't know that I took any young woman home.”

“Well, where did you take her to, then?”

“I did not take her anywhere. She went.”

“It's all the same, only you diplomatic fellows are so confoundedly sharp as to a word more or less.”

“Not less, we don't mind that; it's too much talking we object to.”

“All right. But, I say, I mean where does she hang out?”

"Never having seen her in that position, I really can't say."

"Well, after all, it's no business of mine ; so keep your own counsel."

"I shall be very happy to accept yours, my dear fellow, when I am in need of good advice," said Mildmay politely, as they turned into the theatre.

"Devilish civil fellah, Mildmay," said Holsters to Cornet Callous, as that ingenuous youth stood with him at the Rag window next day. Mildmay had just come out of the Exclusive, which, as all the world knows, is a little lower down the street, on the opposite side of the way. He nodded good-naturedly to those young military fledglings as he passed, and then Holsters, remembering the complimentary speech of the night before, spoke that little encomium on his friend which we have already chronicled. It was short, but emphatic (as far as the young Lieutenant's vocabulary went, he did his best); and then,

having spoken, according to his lights, at some length, on the extraordinary diplomatic talents Mildmay had already displayed, and of the brilliant career that doubtless awaited him, Holsters returned to the ballet, from which he had only digressed on the appearance of Mildmay, and became still more profoundly eloquent upon a topic, in the discussion of which he felt himself infinitely more at home than in that of Mildmay's political genius.





CHAPTER III.

ROSTOCK CRESCENT.

WE certainly have not much for which to thank the Four Georges. Dulness and coarseness combined are not likely to prove patrons of the fine arts; and the monarchs of the Hanoverian dynasty were conspicuous for their insensibility to beauty, and for their debased tastes in all matters æsthetic. The great men of the Georgian period were great, it might almost be said, rather in spite of royalty than because of royal encouragements and honours fostered their genius and rewarded their labours; for mediocrity was safe, and dulness *de rigueur*.

But to the "sweet Queen," as Miss Burney (with a flunkeyism which would be contemptible but that it has also its other and touching side) called the royal but parsimonious and unsympathetic spouse of George the Third—to the "sweet Queen" we are indebted for the names round about those regions in the Bloomsbury quarter of London, of which Mecklenburg and Brunswick-squares, Caroline and Charlotte-streets are the chiefest glories. There was a time, yea within the memory of man, when the beauty and fashion of London was wont to congregate and sun itself hereabouts, and when Woburn-place and Gower-street were fashionable neighbourhoods; but not even those potential names have saved their brick-and-mortar god-children from that oblivion which comes in turn to all and everything in this world; their glories are departed, and beauty and fashion haunt those shades no more.

Rostock-crescent was one of those abo-

minations of desolation, that lead one to speculate reflectively on the probable end, aim, and design of the wretched architect who conceived it, and of the builder who carried out, the atrocious conception. One comes to the conclusion, that the architect was a misanthrope, and the builder a hypochondriac; and that they, in their combined hatred of mankind, and to avenge their imaginary woes, had united themselves to render others as uncomfortable and discontented as they themselves were.

One side of the street was called Strelitz-street. Here were numberless "apartments to let furnished," and "lodgings for single men." Every alternate house seemed to be occupied by a tailor, and in the windows of the intermediate ones old prints of the fashions, and, now and then, an impossible sleeve or cape, or some other mysterious portion of the female toilette, elegantly executed in white tissue-paper, with green or yellow trimmings, seemed to in-

— — — — —
dicate that dressmakers and sempstresses had also pitched their tents in this uninviting district. The street was so narrow that it is possible the architect who made the original design had been forced to bend the opposite side of it out into a crescent, or the tailors and needlewomen would have risen in a body and revolted at the outer darkness to which they were condemned. Anyhow, it had been so bent, and, though the result was far from beautiful, it was doubtless satisfactory to the opposite neighbours, who sat all day close up against the small dirty windows of their dingy little rooms, sewing, so to speak, body and soul together, with a hungry weary monotony that was melancholy beyond all words, and eloquent above any clamours.

Rostock-crescent had originally been stuccoed, but the cake of composition had long ago fallen off, and the dirty brick looked forth all the dirtier and more dismal for the occasional patches of white plaster

which clung to the mean little houses, like clusters of fungi, born of damp and ruin.

The bend of the crescent was so shallow that the little road in front of the houses was too narrow for any known vehicle (unless it had been a wheelbarrow) to have driven up to the door of any house situated in the row; the garden looked like a plaything garden, and the road like a make-believe road (as indeed it was); and the houses had evidently been built to match their surroundings. Tradesmen's carts were fortunately never seen in this locality; the inhabitants of Strelitz-street and Rostock-crescent were in the habit of fetching the simple articles of food which they required in bags or baskets, and these were seldom of such dimensions as to cause their purchasers any difficulty in carrying.

Children abounded in Strelitz-street; the pavement swarmed with them; the doorsteps were covered with them; the windows were full of them. It was a dis-

tinative feature of the place ; but they were fortunately far less abundant in Rostock-crescent ; which, partly on that account, partly because of the departed glories of its stucco, and the present glories of its garden, assumed to itself a higher and more exclusive gentility. “The Crescent” was spoken of with a certain awe and respect, mingled with the pride of semi-possession by the dwellers in Strelitz-street, to whom the remoteness from the thoroughfare, and the semicircular retirement of their opposite neighbours, appeared enviably like rural felicity.

The houses in the crescent could boast of no flight of steps ascending to their doors. You walked straight in from the pavement, and found yourself in a passage so narrow, that a moderately broad-shouldered person must have made abrasions on the paper, though he “went” never so “delicately.” A little parlour opened out of this passage, and behind the parlour was a

small bed-room, nearly as dark as a cellar, from the fact that Strelitz-street having been bent out on one side into Rostock-crescent, the devoted little tenements in that melancholy row abutted on a high brick wall, so that what was gained in front was lost behind; the only advantage in this piece of moral equity being, that from the street-side both rows of houses were benefited; and that, though the more genteel crescent was somewhat curtailed in its back premises (especially towards the middle, where the scoop was greatest), the tailors and sempstresses had air and light whereby to pursue their handiwork. The windows in Rostock-crescent were round-topped, methodist-chapel-like windows, of a depressing pattern, and filled with the cheapest and greenest of glass. In the second story, small iron balconies were attached to each window; and although not made to sit or stand upon, they were capable of holding a few flower-pots, and

were thus used by some of the more well-to-do inhabitants of the place. Into one of these houses Grace Hepburn had turned on the rainy afternoon when she had sighed so over the early darkness, and when little Holsters had so groaned in the spirit over the lengthiness of the day. She passed quickly up the stairs, and opening the door of the small back room, hastily laid aside her mantle. She shook the rain-drops off her dress; washed her hands, smoothed her hair, and then passed into the front room.

The fire was low. Near the fireplace was an old horsehair sofa; and on the sofa lay Grace's father. He did not move as she came in; and seeing that he was asleep she gently removed the pipe which he had laid down upon the chair by his side before falling asleep. A pipe—but a wonderful pipe of the finest meerschaum, carved with such marvellous carving, that the eye rested on the beautiful figures with surprise and pleasure.

The lovely supple limbs of Venus and the Graces had assumed a somewhat dark hue, but their divine beauty remained the same; the polished arms and graceful necks, the flowing locks and slender hands and feet, all were so pure in form, so harmonious in proportion, that one instinctively recognised the artist's hand in the tobacco-stained marvel. "Dark but comely, like the daughters of Jerusalem," were those classic beauties. To a connoisseur the pipe was priceless, and even to the uninitiated it must have appeared a gem. Grace lifted it tenderly from the chair, blew out the tobacco-dust that remained in it, and then laid it carefully away in its velvet-lined case on the mantelpiece. The smell of tobacco was abhorrent to her; but she handled her enemy reverently, with that instinctive love of beauty, and tenderness for and appreciation of the harmonious in form, which had been born in her. Then she sat down by the fire, and resting

her chin in her hands, and her elbows on her knees, gazed into the coal with a long earnest far-off gaze that told how deeply her mind was preoccupied. From time to time she put a coal upon the fire, lifting it with her delicate hand from the scuttle, and dropping it lightly on the glowing cinders lest it should disturb or awaken her father. Presently, when the blaze grew bright, she moved a little, and shading her eyes with her hand, leant back against the corner of the fireplace.

Of what was she thinking? Of the dearness of provisions? Of the price of oil, and coals, and candles? Of her work in the British Museum? Of the handsome stranger who had sheltered her from the rain, and despite her shabby clothing treated her as though she had been a princess? Or was she wondering what Mr. Jacobs the Jew broker would give her for her copy of the little Gerard Dow which he had ordered, but for which she had as

yet received no payment? No; she was thinking of none of these things. She had thought of the coals and candles in the afternoon when she had sighed and looked up at the skylight; but now that she sat staring into the fire she did not think of them at all; as to the "swell" who had proved himself such a friend in the hour of need, she had as totally forgotten him as though umbrellas were not yet invented, and rain an almost unknown phenomenon. Poor Mildmay! the curled and scented darling of so many drawing-rooms; the favourite partner of so many Viennese Countesses, of such an army of Berlin beauties, of such a phalanx of fascinating Parisiennes,—he was totally forgotten by this poor proud girl, who in her abstraction scarcely felt grateful to him for his friendly action. Was she thinking of the statue she had been copying? of the young athlete with the god-like brow, and beautiful resolute mouth and chin? Perhaps so. But

through this girl's life there ran one thought, absorbing all other thoughts, as the ocean absorbs all tributary streams. She did not specially *think* this thought. It came to her: it was there: it was a principle of her life; and in each simplest action, in each daily task and prosaic occupation it has its part; involuntarily, half unconsciously, it may be, but none the less securely on that account. She rose up with it in the morning, she lay down with it at night; it walked by her side through the crowded street, it guided her hand, it beat in her heart, it spoke in her voice, it pervaded every action of her life, and coloured every impulse of her soul.

As yet Grace had not recognised this fact. The dreamer, as long as he dreams, knows not that he does so. It is when he awakes that he becomes aware of the visions he has seen; of the rose-coloured glories of that beautiful dreamland from which a rough hand has torn him, to plunge

him into the pale realities of this sad-coloured work-a-day world. Grace Hepburn still dreamt; but her awakening was near.

A neighbouring clock struck six; she rose, and began to prepare the table for their simple evening meal. When all was ready, she lighted a small hand-lamp that stood upon a bracket near the door, and then went to wake her father. His eyes were open — great pale blue eyes, like Grace's own; fringed with dark lashes, peculiar in colour, beautiful in shape, but not altogether pleasant to look at, for all that. They were eyes that awakened dim, undefined uneasiness in looking at them, though it would have been difficult to account for this feeling. He sighed as she touched him, and then, putting his hand round her neck, said, still half asleep: "Is it you, darling? I did not hear you come in; I must have been asleep some time." Then he kissed her, and Grace led him to

the table. The beautiful blue eyes stared into the flame of the lamp, and never blinked. He was stone-blind,—utterly, hopelessly, eternally blind—for ever, and ever, and ever. He knew this, and he was resigned,—resigned, that is, so far as the renunciation of all participation in the delight of sight, and colour, and form, and effect was concerned; but in no wise resigned to be an object of pity to his fellow-men,—in no wise resigned to the dependency and helplessness of this darkened life; by no means reconciled to the enforced idleness, to the weary hours of solitude that his condition brought with it; by no means resigned to the fact that his beautiful, graceful one, his darling, his crown of life, the delight of his once clear but now poor sightless eyes, his treasure, for whom he had dreamt to win glory and renown, luxuries and dainty living, purple and fine linen, and daily sumptuous fare, and greetings in the market-place, and high

places at festive gatherings,—should have to work and toil for bread ; should have to walk long miles, alone, unprotected, through rain and mud, to earn the simple food they ate, the modest clothes they wore. How could he be resigned to this? It would have required all the fervent piety of a saint to bow the head and fold the hands, and say in single-heartedness, “Thy will be done,” under such a grievous affliction, such a bitter trial as this. And Warren Hepburn had never been a saint, but rather—as he himself would have been the first to confess—in his day a sinner among sinners. His affliction he could have borne and did bear bravely, in so far as it was only a question of personal deprivation and loss ; and he would have concealed in his own heart the bitterness of the terrible trial that had come upon him, if such concealment could have averted all the consequences to others which must result from this awful blow. To these consequences, and all the

long train of after evils that they might, and inevitably *must*, bring with them, he was in no wise resigned. Nay, a hundred times, in the loneliness of his darkened day, he declared to himself that he never could be so, and that the burden laid upon him was greater than he could bear.

Society—even such society as was possible for him—he harshly refused. He never went out.

In the dusk of the summer evenings Grace would coax him forth into the soft twilight, and they would wander arm in arm round the silent squares, talking cheerfully enough. These were the bright hours of life for the saddened man. Then he would talk of the past; of that past which his young wife had made so beloved and beautiful to him, in spite of the manifold trials that had come to their married life. Even the most prosaic past assumes a certain beauty of its own when time has set its hallowing seal on fond recollections and

tender associations. We are all of us prone to be ungrateful to the present, and (if our lot in life has been a hard one) mistrustful and apprehensive of the future. But Warren Hepburn's past was no prosaic one; it was full of poetry, of light, of warmth, of colour, of Italian skies and perfumed nights, of art, and love, and song. When Grace could get her father to speak of bygone days, she was always happy; it had a hallowing, softening influence upon him. In the tender memories of the past he would lose the bitter sense of the present, though at times, when the reaction came, his desperate spirit would rise in all the more furious rebellion, in all the wilder pain, for the comparisons which, like evil demons, suggested themselves, whispering blasphemies and revolt unceasingly into his ear.

His murmurs were never for himself. It never occurred to him to say, "Why should I, to whom form and colour, beauty

and grace, were 'joys for ever;' why should I, to whose hand cunning had been given to reproduce with subtle art and delicate instinct all that my eyes saw; why should I be thus unjustly visited? Why should I, to whom life was in itself good enough, without any unrighteous hankerings after other goods which the gods denied,—why should I be thus afflicted? Why was not some poor, insignificant, brainless boor substituted in my place? why was not some dull, spiritless, useless drone, some helpless clod, chosen to bear a darkness which his obscure mind would scarcely have felt?" Warren Hepburn's rebellion never took this form. Of himself, and of his own sufferings, he was silent. Perhaps some dim notions, shadowy and undefined, but making themselves felt, as the clouds do which momentarily obscure the sunshine; perhaps some dim notion of a Nemesis stilled his murmurs as regarded himself. But for her, for his Grace, his darling, his beloved

one, he murmured and rebelled. For her he repined and vainly resisted; for her he shed bitter tears, salt with the concentrated agony of sorrow.

But just now he sat cheerfully by the tea-table, and Grace and he were talking, as people will talk, though the direst evils beset their lives, of a thousand-and-one indifferent trifles. He was always ready to be cheerful for her sake, and had so much to say that was interesting on so many various subjects, that Grace always listened to him with perfect delight. Many a valuable hint he gave her in matters of art; many a trenchant criticism and many a subtle judgment had reached her from this source, and she listened to him with reverence, and treasured his words with love. He knew all the picture-galleries of the Continent, and was equally familiar with the art-treasures of the Vatican and the Grüne Gewölbe, of Dresden and Florence, of Munich and Bologna, of London

and Paris and Berlin. His memory never failed him, and all that he had read came to help him, as well as all that he had seen ; so that at times Grace would become anxious lest the brain that was so full of facts and imagination, of numbers and history, of poetry and dates, might sink under the accumulated burden of the observation and study of years.

But now they sat by the tea-table, and the kettle was singing merrily, and the very rain beating against the windows seemed to give them a ray of additional cheerfulness, making their shelter more apparent, and their security from the pitiless storm without doubly pleasant to them.

They were thus sitting, when a knock came to the door of their room. A clear, gentle, and yet precise knock, as though the fingers which rapped were delicate, lithe, and yet not over-fleshy fingers ; it had a certain clear, rapid rhythm, and was almost harmonious and agreeable, like

some little simple musical instrument skillfully played.

"That is Bender's knock," said Hepburn, with the quick perception of sound common to the blind.

"Shall he come in, father?"

"Yes; let him come in."

Then Grace rose, and went to open the door of their room to the visitor, who stood patiently outside, waiting for permission to enter. The light streamed out into the little dark passage, and Grace's figure, standing out against the warm glow, looked almost queenly to the knocker, who with an instinctive delicacy had retreated a step or two down the narrow staircase, lest he might by chance overhear any of the conversation within the thin badly-fitting deal door.

Now, as he stood looking up, it seemed to him that the gates of Paradise were opened, and that a beautiful angel was standing at the door, not driving him forth

with a flaming sword, but inviting him, in a clear harmonious voice, to enter.

“Good-evening, Herr Bender,” said Grace, looking out upon the landing; for though she could not see their visitor, she knew that her father’s instinct had not misled him. “Good-evening. My father will be very happy to see you, if you will come in.”

“To see you!” She used the old familiar formula; and so, though her father could not see him, Herr Bender passed in.


“I have brought back your watch, Mr. Hepburn,” said the pale young German, as he laid a handsome gold chronometer down upon the table.





CHAPTER IV.

“YOU WERE ASLEEP, FATHER.”

RACE had taken up her work, and sat silently sewing. She listened to the two men's talk, but did not attempt to join in it. She was always glad when her father found some congenial mind, and when in pleasant intercourse he could forget for a moment the terrible evil that had come to his life.

She had no false pride; and it never occurred to her as a humiliating fact, that her father, formerly of her Majesty's —th Lancers, and the son of an ancient house, should find pleasure in the intelligent conversation of the young German mechanic, who was now so eagerly com-

paring notes as to some points of difference in the opinions of Leibnitz and Sir Isaac Newton.

Grace knew her father's history perfectly well. He had told it to her himself without varnish, and she was not ashamed of it. Knew how, as a lieutenant in a cavalry regiment, he had run through a great deal of money, had got into debt, and even worse troubles; had been rescued by his good old father, and received like the prodigal in the New Testament with open arms again. How his elder brother had looked on his prodigality and his forgiveness alike with an evil eye, and had never welcomed him with a brother's welcome home again. How his parents urged his marrying a lady whose estates joined the Hepburn property; and how he had tried to overcome his repugnance to the match, and to meet his parents' views; but how every instinct of honour and truth had revolted against the compromise, and he had

gone to the lady herself, and confessed the whole truth and the motives of his feigned affection. She forgave him; and she remained his friend through a long number of years; then they had both married, and Hepburn had heard nothing more of his once-betrothed.

Grace knew how, finally, after his father and mother's death, her father had plunged into a vortex of dissipation seven times worse than the first; for now nothing had a hold upon his affections; the old home was hateful to him, and there was a deadly feud between the brothers.

Hepburn's love of the beautiful, his intense appreciation of art, his correct taste and clear judgment, had led him in former days to work diligently with his pencil and brush; and his pictures were even then far above mediocrity. Then, a smile from his mother had been sufficient incentive to, and reward for, his industry; and the walls of her boudoir at Hepburn Manor still bore

evidences of his talent. But in later days poverty, or something very like poverty, had again stimulated him to exertion, and his name was honourably known in many an art-studio. After his parents' death had come that period of wild Bohemianism to which I have already alluded, and then Hepburn had met his fate.

At Florence dwelt an English sculptor, and to this sculptor he had letters of introduction. Three months after he had presented his credentials he was married to the sculptor's niece,—a fair, gentle girl in the first blush of womanhood; standing, in fact,

"With reluctant feet"

beside

"The brook where womanhood and childhood meet."

She was not very specially beautiful, this fair northern flower; but she had a nameless charm about her, and a sweet gentle womanliness, that seemed to have ripened into a sunnier grace beneath the

warm Italian sun. She was pure, lovely, and of good report; and Warren Hepburn loved her passionately, with all the ardour of an only and absorbing passion. For her sake he wished—ah! how bitterly, none but himself could know—that all the stains upon his manhood might, by future faith and devotion, be wiped out. He felt that he was unworthy of her; but he felt also that he could not live without her, that life without her would be a purposeless blank, a living death;—for he had no religion, this wild, impassioned man, to sanctify his afflictions to him, and to soften grief. She was not very difficult to win. Probably any one might have won her who had come, as Warren Hepburn had done, to woo with a fixed determination to succeed, with a real intense love glowing in his heart. Hers was a gentle, passive nature, and she would have bent to any strong will; but in the present case it was not difficult for her so to bend, for Hepburn

came to her in the beauty and strength of manhood, full of ardour and devotion, glowing with enthusiasm, an artist-soul, eager, gay, and sociable. Many an Italian had offered incense at her shrine; but it had been incense, and nothing more. They admired her as they admired the golden-haired Madonnas of their old masters, and they laid their homage at her feet, thinking of her as some beautiful star, some pure lily, some bright, cold, distant dream of loveliness. “Your northern beauties are so cold,” they would say. And, in fact, she was not beautiful, only essentially womanly, and as bright and pure inwardly as she was outwardly.

Hepburn had no one’s feelings to consult but hers and his own. He had some independent property (considerably diminished, it is true, by his wanderings in foreign lands), and was ready, eager indeed, to work hard, and win for himself a name and place amongst the men of his day.

The feeling of unworthiness on his side grew and deepened; so that at last he came to marvel at the fate which had brought this pure angel to walk by his side along the thorny paths of life. She was always gentle, patient, and kind; never demonstrative; never lively, or capricious, or affectionate, or saucy. She was equably good and calm; and in this calm and gentleness her husband's eager, ambitious, passionate nature found repose. He wondered at her. He found her perfect, without flaw, or speck, or blemish. He worshipped her through long years; and when she died, he felt as though the only good for him was in the thought that death would reunite him to his beloved one. But Warren Hepburn was a man—manly. Where he saw oppression, there his indignation burned; where he saw cruelty, there his strong right arm was bared; where he saw weakness, thither he carried his strength. And now his young

daughter appealed to him for a double love, a double care, a double tenderness and watchfulness and devotion. The weak never appealed to him in vain; and for his lamb's sake he would be strong. So he fought and struggled with that wild desire for death; combated his grief, and conquered it. Of the terrible fever which had laid him low — had robbed him of his sight, had wasted his substance, had brought misery upon him worse than all former miseries — I will not now speak. He had travelled from land to land, seeking relief at the hands of science; but there is a point beyond which science does not go, and this fact he at last recognised on that day when a doctor, more truthful than the rest, and more skilled than they, had told him in tender, solemn tones the awful crushing truth, that he was hopelessly blind—hopelessly. He had lived on hope for so long, that his sentence fell upon him with all the cruelty of surprise. At first

he refused to give up all hope. Then—then came a time when he prayed (in his own uncouth, unorthodox way) that he might be kept from a too utter despair.

Grace sat sewing and listening. She heard the names of Leibnitz and Descartes, of Spinoza and Newton ; and yet, though she sat and listened and sewed, her mind was unconsciously full of one thought, and her being filled with the one presence which had come to be so inseparably incorporated with every word and deed of her life.

She never looked up ; her busy fingers moved monotonously to and fro, and her eyes rested on her work, whilst they saw far-off things, invisible to other sight. Hepburn and the pale German were still amongst the philosophers, when a somewhat sharp knock at the street-door caused the blood to mount for an instant to Grace's clear pale cheek. The disputants were far too eager to pay any attention to sublunary matters.

"Leibnitz, however, held a contrary opinion," said Herr Bender; "he believed Descartes' theory to be a most erroneous one, and sought to combat it with all the energy of an essentially truth-loving nature; at the same time—"

But a short knock at the door was followed by the appearance of a tall figure wrapped in a large cloak.

"Good-evening, Mr. Hepburn," said a sonorous and yet pleasantly ringing voice. "I have not stood on ceremony. Bender is my host, and has most inhospitably gone out himself after inviting me to spend the evening with him. Mrs. Boxer told me he was 'up-stairs,' so I have come to seek him, and expose his treachery. Good-evening, Miss Hepburn;" for Grace, hidden by the shadow of a great leather arm-chair, had but now risen to her feet from the low stool on which she was sitting.

"Good-evening, Doctor."

"I wish you would tell her not to go

out such weather as this,” said her father somewhat fretfully. “There is no occasion for it, and she risks taking a severe cold.”

“You should not go out unnecessarily, Miss Hepburn,” said the Doctor obediently, but smiling as he spoke.

Grace had no reply ready. She coloured slightly, and then said, “I am glad to employ my spare time. You know I am not always able to do just what I like with it.”

“But getting wet is not employing your spare time very profitably.”

“I did not get wet.”

“But it was pouring in torrents between four and five, the hour at which Mr. Hepburn says you were returning.”

“Miss Hepburn had an umbrella,” said Bender.

Then Grace remembered that she had said nothing about her escort home, and she now regretted not having done so. She had not in truth entirely forgotten it,

though it had only once passed through her mind during the evening's conversation; but she had resolved not to mention it, because it was just things of this sort that were sure to rouse her father's anger, and make his repinings loud. Now she was vexed at having to explain in the presence of witnesses; and yet she felt herself imperatively called upon to do so, for she knew that Herr Bender had seen her, and it would not do for her to have the appearance of wishing to conceal what was in her eyes so simple a fact from her father.

“A gentleman offered me his umbrella,” she said, making an effort to appear unconcerned. “I would not accept it, so he kindly brought me home.”

Her face flushed brightly as she spoke, and in her heart there was an unreasonable movement of anger and dislike to Bender for his stupid observation.

“A gentleman brought you home? What gentleman? You never told me that,

Grace? Why did you not tell me directly you came in?”

“You were asleep, father.”

“But I have not been asleep ever since. Who was it? What gentleman?” he asked again angrily.

“I do not know, father.”

“Then how do you know he was a gentleman? Is every impertinent jackanapes, every impudent loiterer, to have the privilege of escorting my daughter home? There shall be an end of it! If this accursed blindness prevents my looking after you, why then you must stay at home.”

By this time Grace was nearly crying, but she said firmly, “He was not impertinent, father; he was a gentleman.”

“There are good Samaritans all over the world,” said the Doctor cheerily; “and I think if Miss Hepburn hasn’t taken cold, there’s no great harm done.”

He spoke pleasantly; but all Mr. Hepburn’s good-humour had vanished, and he

continued to reproach Grace with secrecy, her cavalier with impertinence, and himself with his blindness, till every one became thoroughly uncomfortable.

“If you had the eyes of Argus, my dear sir,” said the Doctor at last, “you could not prevent a well-disposed young man from being courteous; and I, for one, am very much obliged to him if he has saved Miss Grace from the influenza.”

But the peace and comfort of the evening were at an end. The Doctor now took leave, saying he had come in search of Bender, and that they had, he feared, already intruded too long.

Mr. Hepburn's natural good-breeding recalled him to himself more effectually, on hearing these words, than any arguments could have done. He rose and courteously accompanied his guests to the door. The two men went downstairs; and forthwith compasses, pencils, and paper were produced, and in a few minutes they were

deep in calculations as to the possible construction of some mechanical marvel that had its existence as yet only in the Doctor's fertile and busy brain. Yet, from time to time, it seemed to Herr Bender that a vivid blush burnt upon the paper, and as though a pair of pale mystic blue eyes looked through the figures at him with a cold anger that was very terrible to bear.

“Why did she keep it secret?” he said to himself. “Why did she blush? Why did she look so scornfully angry at me? She said she did not know his name; shall I doubt her word? But why did she persist so in repeating that he was a gentleman? Ah! that word covers a multitude of sins with you cold, proud English,” he said somewhat bitterly to himself, as he sat before his little fire musing over the evening's occurrences an hour or two later, after he had let the Doctor out of the little street-door with all the abstruse calculations that they had been making in his coat-pocket.

The evening was fine, and the moon shone brightly; but Herr Bender did not pause to enjoy the change in the weather. He shut the door gently, lest it should disturb the other lodgers, and then he went back to his little fire to muse. He wanted to be alone. “A gentleman!” he said to himself again, angrily. “And what is a gentleman? A man that is clothed in purple and fine linen, and fares sumptuously every day. Then I do not envy the ultimate fate of gentlemen, for we all remember the parable of Dives. A gentleman? A man in *gants glacés*, who is to be seen gaping out of his club-windows at the vulgar world beneath him? A man who is always languid, never surprised, never pleased, never unhappy? A man who will cut his own father with the greatest *sang-froid*, and gamble away his sister’s marriage portion? A man who lives on his debts, has ready-money enough for all his pleasures, but not a penny to spare for the

poor wretch who lies starving on his door-steps? A man who neither thinks with his mind, nor feels with his heart, nor judges with his understanding? A man who is less a man than a puppet? Was Shakespeare a gentleman, I wonder? Was Lessing? Was Schiller? Was Goethe?” said the angry young man to himself. “People were men before they were gentlemen. I do not know whether they have grown more noble and more manly for the ‘gentle’ prefix. I hate the word.” But Herr Bender’s democratic criticisms were perhaps more energetic than just; more particularly interesting to himself than they would be generally edifying to others. By and by he rose to go to his little dark bed-room, and as he got up, he said aloud, “The Doctor is certainly a man, but I wonder whether *she* would consider *him* a gentleman?”



CHAPTER V.

BROOKSIDE HOUSE.

BROOKSIDE HOUSE could by no stretch of the imagination be called a pretty place. It was redeemed from positive ugliness by its trim lawns, gorgeous flower-beds, and well-kept walks and drives; but although this sort of extrinsic beauty might make it pleasing in the eyes of those that dwelt within its red-brick walls, and had grown up with the younger trees of the young plantations, no stranger could be expected to fall into any rhapsody of delight over its picturesque exterior or harmonious *ensemble*. It was approached by a short carriage-drive innocent of lodge, though the gardener's house

stood near enough to the iron gate (which led into the high road) for the young embryo gardeners, who were not old enough as yet to be employed in weeding, to rush out and open it to any visitors who did not come on foot through the small postern that was cunningly devised for the ingress and egress of pedestrians, in its floriated iron barrier.

The house itself was, as we have already said, of red brick with heavy white stone copings. It consisted of a centre building and two irregular wings; that on the left being larger and more imposing than the original building itself; that on the right somewhat narrower, but a story higher than the middle part of the house. The hall, which was large, and plainly furnished with an oak table, some stags' heads and antlers, a few curious chairs, and some old china, was very comfortable just now, for a large fire was blazing cheerfully in the open fireplace, and a group of children

were seated round it, stringing red and yellow berries on to long threads and chatting merrily amongst each other. A huge white rocking-horse stood in one of the windows, and was seldom without a rider : at present baby was mounted, and having taken the poor animal's tail out, was encouraging the indefatigable beast to quicker action by using that appendage as a whip. Presently the dining-room door opened, and a tall lady came forth with a bundle of flannel and linen in her plump white hands, and passed up the wide staircase which led to the bed-room story. Mrs. Mildmay was one of those large, fair, motherly women who never seem to get much older, and who go placidly through life, as though trouble, and misery, and want, and sickness belonged to another world, and were only to be read of in books. Not but that she was charitable and benevolent enough in her way; but her lines had fallen in pleasant places, and

she did not think it her duty to go *out* of her way to seek for the unpleasantnesses that were providentially spared her.

— Like all persons whose lives are fair and prosperous, she had a certain amiable selfishness, looking at everything from her own particular stand-point, and only regarding the chances and changes of this troublesome life in so far as they affected or might affect her children, her husband, or herself: for, to do her justice, she always put herself last in the list, and this of impulse and natural inclination.

Mrs. Mildmay passed with her packet of poor's clothes up the staircase, and into her dressing-room, where her maid was at work, and where her daughter was busy cutting-out pinafores, frocks, and undergarments for Christmas distribution amongst the women and children of Brookside village.

She looked up as her mother came in, but did not leave her occupation to relieve Mrs. Mildmay of her burden. When she

had finished her task, however, she walked across the room towards the sofa where the calico and flannel lay, and examining each alternately, spoke with her mother about the way in which it would be best to dispose of it.

Honorina Mildmay was two-and-twenty years of age. She was tall and well-shaped, like her mother, but there the resemblance ceased. Honorina's face was an acute, energetic one. She was active and quick in all her movements, and intolerant of anything that seemed to her like indolence or languor in others. She was essentially practical, and was skilful in all kinds of needlework. Anything like sentiment or romance was abhorrent to her. I say 'abhorrent' advisedly, for hers was not a nature to take things passively, and to let the world come and go, without any special interference on her part; she had decided views upon most points; and though she was for the most part chary of giving her opinion, yet she

had (and held) the same in a manner somewhat remarkable for so young a woman. I do not believe that she had ever read a line of Tennyson or Longfellow in her life; and it stood on record that she had once quarrelled violently with her younger sister for proposing to read *Aurora Leigh* aloud to her during a period of convalescence from a severe typhus fever caught in coming home from an outlying district of the parish, where cholera was raging. She was honourable, truthful, unselfish, and energetic: these were her good points. The bad ones, if she had any, will doubtless in time speak for themselves.

As she stood by the table reckoning up yards and inches, measuring breadths and lengths, she looked strangely unlike what her mother's daughter might have been expected to look. Her hair, which was very abundant and jet black, was drawn off her face, plaited in one thick plait, and fastened up, ungracefully enough, at the back of her

head with a comb, after a fashion that had long since exploded, and had nothing but neatness to recommend it. At that time long full skirts were worn; but Honoria's draperies fell as stiffly and straightly as those of a mediæval saint, and barely reached the ground. Her hands were beautiful—white, plump, and delicately formed. Her face was of a clear healthy dark; the features good, regular, and not without distinction; but there was an observant, restless look in her quick dark eyes, that gave one the idea that she was looking out for work to do, for faults to correct, for discrepancies to remedy, for mistakes to counteract. There was a business-like air and want of repose about her, that was, perhaps, all the more striking by contrast with her mother's suave, gentle manner. But then no one who knew Honoria Mildmay ever expected suavity from her. The amenities of life she regarded as sinful luxuries, all the more sinful because so often (so she

said) but hypocrisies and deceit veiled beneath plausible words.

“Where is Sibyl?” said Mrs. Mildmay at last, after a quarter of an hour’s silence, and quick business on Honoria’s part.

“I really don’t know, mamma.”

Honoria did not offer to go and look for her sister; in fact, she considered her flannel petticoats of infinitely more importance than Sibyl’s possible whereabouts.

Sibyl was seated in the drawing-room, with her feet on the fender, dozing over a novel. She was younger than Honoria, but had already been married four years, and still seemed quite as much of a child as when at seventeen she had surprised every one by declaring herself engaged to be married to Mr. Somers, a neighbouring squire, more than twice her age, and with a little encumbrance in the shape of a weird sallow child about eight years old;—had surprised every one, and eternally displeased her sister Honoria, who, though

only eighteen herself at the time, was as decided in her views, and perhaps a little more frank with her opinions, than she was now at two-and-twenty. Mr. Somers had been a widower seven years. He was very much in love with Sibyl, was well off, sufficiently agreeable, and not bad-looking. But Honoria could not forgive her sister, and had not yet forgiven her. She declared the whole thing to be a piece of self-delusion on Sibyl's part; and then, when she saw her declarations were disregarded and remonstrances useless, she ceased to declaim on her sister's romantic folly; that is, she ceased to declaim aloud, but in her heart she was more angry than ever, and justified this persistency of wrath to herself with a plausibility that was quite inconsistent in a person so highly principled.

Sibylla, endowed like her mother with a great amount of placidity and no small powers of endurance, did not suffer her feelings to be ruffled by Honoria's eloquence.

“You will see, Sibyl,” she had said to her one day, “you will see how he will tyrannise over you, and you will repent your folly when it is too late.”

Sibyl made no reply, but in her own mind she settled that it would be more agreeable to endure Mr. Somers’ tyranny than to submit to Honoria’s scoldings.

“What do you know about bringing-up children?” said the elder sister indignantly, trying another tack; “especially step-children?”

“But there are no children,” said Sibyl apologetically; “only a child, you know.”

“Children, or child, it’s all the same,” her sister had angrily retorted; “it’s of no good splitting straws, Sibyl. Now *do* you understand the bringing-up of a child—of a step-child?” she added, with awful emphasis on the qualifying adjective.

“But I am not to bring it up,” Sibyl had answered plaintively; “he says so. He and Miss Strong have brought it up for

seven or eight years. Why should I interfere?"

"Why, indeed?" said Honoria with superb sarcasm. She was angry with her sister for calling Mr. Somers "he," as though there were no other "he" in the world; but Sibyl instinctively felt that her sister would be still more indignant if she called her intended "Henry," and her loyal little soul revolted at "Mr. Somers," for she had promised him that very day, after sundry kisses in the conservatory, never to call him by that distant formula again.

Now Sibyl sat dozing over her novel in the comfortable drawing-room at Brookside, and her baby was riding the rocking-horse, with that devoted and indefatigable animal's tail for a whip, and the little sallow step-child, now eleven years of age, sat in front of the hall-fire with two twin Mildmays, aged ten, who, after a long interregnum, had come to inhabit the long-

closed nursery again, and make the house untidy and cheerful with childish ways and childish laughter.

“He will be here soon, Honoria,” said Mrs. Mildmay, as that busy damsel took up a fresh roll of flannel.

“In about seven minutes, mamma,” she answered, looking at her watch.

“Will you not come down stairs?”

“I must finish this set of petticoats first; but I shall be at the bottom of the staircase as soon as you will get out of the drawing-room. Besides, I shall see the fly coming through the gates.”

This was a long speech for Honoria.

Mrs. Mildmay coughed.

“Will you not change your dress?” she said, not without an effort, after a moment’s pause. It was not easy to suggest things to Honoria, but it was easier than being demonstrative or affectionate to her.

“Thank you, mamma, I changed it when I came in.”

"I thought, perhaps," said Mrs. Mildmay, hesitating a little, and not looking at her daughter, "that you would let Phillips arrange your hair for you. You are tired with your long walk, and all this work—"

"Thank you, mamma, I am not the least tired; and Phillips does not understand the way I do my hair."

Poor Mrs. Mildmay! She saw it was useless beating about the bush any longer; so with a supreme effort she rose, came nearer to her daughter, and said in lower tones, so that the maid should not overhear her words of pleading, "Honorina dear, he has been away so long, and—and—you know first impressions are lasting, and Harold was always fastidious; do, to please me, make a little difference in your dress; he will think you are not pleased to see him, if you receive him thus."

"Then he will think wrongly, mamma."

"But, Honorina—"

"There's no time, mamma, for any al-

teration; and besides, why should I cheat him by trying to look different to-day from what I shall look to-morrow?"

"He has seen so much of the world, Honoria, I should not like him to be discontented with his home, or that he should draw comparisons between the ladies he has met abroad and his sister, to the disadvantage of the latter."

"If he does either, mamma, he will have returned more foolish than he went away," said Honoria, smiling.

When Honoria smiled, she had something very charming about her.

"But really, dear, your dress is not—"

"Fashionable," put in Honoria. "Perhaps not, mamma; but if Harold does not like me as I am, he will never like me, for I am too old to alter."

Just then an old fly came lumbering along the drive; and the children, who had been on the look-out, were heard rushing

up the stairs, screaming, "Harold is come, mamma! Harold is here!"

Yes, Harold was come; and Honoria had cut-out two flannel-petticoats and a boy's shirt whilst she had been arguing with her mother. Sibyl, roused by the children's shouts, had run into the hall; and as Mrs. Mildmay came down the staircase, with Honoria behind her, she saw her son already holding his youngest sister clasped in his arms.





CHAPTER VI.

HAROLD AT HOME.

HAROLD MILD MAY had been away from home some years. Quite long enough to be alive to any peculiarities in his family, and also quite long enough to have formed independent opinions upon men and things, not to speak of women. He had felt agreeably surprised when, after clasping Sibyl in a brotherly embrace, he had put her away from him, and holding his sister at arm's-length, had looked into her fair peach-like face, all sparkling with pretty pleasurable excitement, to find how lovely she was. He had not seen her since her wedding, when she had been but a slip of a girl.

A mere child he had then mentally called her; and now she had developed into a graceful, lovely woman. But if his inspection of Sibyl had filled him with pleasurable emotions, and her beauty had agreeably surprised him, the vision of Honoria on the staircase, behind her mother, had aroused no such pleasant astonishment in his mind. Three or four years had developed one sister into beauty, and had dulled the other into premature old-maidishness. It was not Harold's fault if he saw, almost before he had kissed his mother, that Honoria's gown was ugly, scanty, ill-made, and ungraceful; that her hair was ill-arranged, and her whole appearance little agreeable to the eye. He was keenly sensitive, and unfortunately alive to such things, and piqued himself also on some little experience in matters of the kind. Still, he folded her also in a brotherly embrace, thinking at the time that she was either in love with the curate, or had been

disappointed in her affections. When all the family salutations were done, and baby once again reinstated on his rocking-horse, with the twins and his step-sister in attendance, Harold had time to look round.

"Can I go to my father?" he said; "or mustn't he be disturbed before the usual time?"

"I think you had better wait, dearest," answered his mother; "he is probably asleep; but the first gong sounds at half-past five, and then he will be happy to see you."

"Let me carry up your sticks, Harold," said one of the twins.

"And me your railway-rugs and mufflers," said Sibyl.

"Look at him paws," said baby, who, being of a turbulent disposition, had slid from his charger unperceived, and was holding up a fat little hand with a great furry glove upon it.

"O, Harold, what funny things!" exclaimed the little sisters in concert.

"Those are what I suck in winter," said Harold, growling and making a funny face.

"Isn't he a lovely creature?" exclaimed Sibyl with enthusiasm, picking up her boy, who struck out lustily at the stranger, and finally caught him by the ear.

"He isn't a bad-looking little kid," said his uncle, with less enthusiasm than, perhaps, the mother had expected. But it is not always easy to be enthusiastic about other people's children, more especially when one is being buffeted and clawed in tender places.

"Let go of uncle Harold's hair, darling, and he shall have the other paw," said Sibyl. Upon which one of the twins brought another great sledge-glove from the heap of cloaks and wraps in the corner, and gave it to the little monster.

"Thanks, darling," said Sibyl; and Harold thought again how pleasant his sister was.

“Let me take you to your room,” said his mother.

“Thanks. But surely I know my way ; or have I got into other quarters ?”

“Yes. Your room has been made into a schoolroom for the three girls, and we keep the old nursery for baby when he comes on a visit.”

Baby meanwhile, having struggled out of his mother's arms, showing a good deal of athletic limb in so doing, had seized a case of fishing-rods, and was running a-tilt at everybody and everything, going down with an ignominious bump after each charge, but getting up again undaunted by the reverses he experienced.

“Just call nurse, dear,” said Sibyl to her little step-daughter.

“I am going up-stairs, and I will tell her,” said Honoria. It was almost the first word she had spoken ; and as she spoke she moved away, and ran quickly up the staircase. She thought time enough had been

wasted, and she could not understand how her mother, who had almost remonstrated with her for not making any special toilette to please her brother, could stand by and see him bored with all these children, and never give Sibyl a hint to have her troublesome baby removed.

In truth, Harold, after the manner of his kind, was not specially given to babies; but he did not in anywise feel bored on the present occasion, and rather appreciated the noise his appearance had created amongst the small fry, thinking it was by no means so disagreeable to be an uncle as he had expected.

“Where is Somers?” he asked in a pause.

“O, he has gone to Wickham; but he will be here to dinner. You know he is a J. P. now.”

“I hope he doesn’t make any blunders. England is a terrible country for showing-up such things.”

“He doesn’t make as many as he did,” answered Sibyl laughing; “but he is continually being attacked in the *Wickham Independent*.”

“Well, those are some of the delights of landed proprietorship, I suppose.”

“Yes; those are some of the delights. But not all. It isn’t altogether such a bad life.”

“It is twenty minutes past five,” said Honoria, coming down the stairs with her watch in her hand. “If Harold wants to go to his room before seeing papa, he must not waste any more time.”

Harold did not feel his intimacy with his sister sufficient to justify any raillery about the “waste of time;” and Sibyl saying that there was no appeal against Honoria’s watch, disappeared after her baby, leaving the mother and son alone.

They went up-stairs together.

“Take my arm, mother,” he said; and she took it, leaning on it with a firm pres-

sure, as though to feel more certain that she had him really there. She was strong and active enough, but yet she leant upon him, and felt so happy in being able thus to rest, that she was almost sorry when they reached his room.

“I hope you will be comfortable, dearest. I am almost afraid you will find our ways strangely old-fashioned and inconvenient, after the manner of life to which you have been lately accustomed.”

“It is all a great deal too good for me, mother.”

Too good for him! What could be too good for him? nay, what could be good enough for him? Was he not all a mother's heart could wish? Had he ever done as other sons do? Had he gambled and got into debt? (Of course she knew nothing of what he had done in this line at Saxe-Pumpenheim.) Was he not strong, and straight, and healthy; were not his eyes honest, and his voice manly, and his whole bearing such

as no mother could but be proud of? Good enough for him! Nothing was good enough for him! And I verily believe, if the door had opened, and a dazzling princess could have walked in clothed in diamonds and gold, adorned with every virgin charm, and clad in every womanly virtue, the fond mother would, in her heart of hearts, have doubted whether her son was not sacrificing himself if he elected to follow the resplendent creature.

But no such princess was imminent. The mother as yet had him all to herself (or thought she had); and as she looked at her son, her eyes filled with tears. He had placed a low chair for her by the fire, and she had sat down, whilst he stood leaning against the chimneypiece, with one hand run through his thick dark hair. But now she got up again, and with a movement that was infinitely touching and graceful, she laid her hand on his shoulder, and kissed him again on both his sunburnt

cheeks. "Dear Harold," she said, "I am so happy to have you; so content to see my boy looking so bravely, and to know that to-night he will sleep once more under the old roof-tree."

"Dear mother"—there was a moment's pause, and then Harold, clearing his voice, asked if he had not better go to his father. He was not a man of demonstrative manner, nor prone to be otherwise than chary of any show of emotion; and now it seemed to him that he ought not to delay seeking that other parent, whose slumbers might by this time be presumed to be finished, since the gong was sounding, and dinner would be ready in another hour.

"Yes, we will go," answered his mother, almost a little reluctantly. Those had been such moments of unalloyed delight to her, in which she had again held her first-born in her arms, had had him "all to herself," that she would fain have prolonged them, and realised her happiness, if that

might be, yet more intensely. But, ever true to her wifely duty, and pleased to see her son anxious to pay his filial respects, she put away the selfish temptation, and prepared to lead him to his father. A moment she paused. "You will find him very much altered, Harold—painfully altered," she said; "but my letters will have prepared you for that." Then she opened the bedroom-door, and went resolutely down the broad passage, which looked comfortable enough for habitation, with its crimson carpeting and comfortable stuffed and cushioned window-seats, filled with baskets of flowers, and cages full of canary-birds and finches, twittering merrily as they hopped to and fro. Mrs. Mildmay pushed back a baize door, and they stood within a smaller vestibule, lighted by a skylight in the daytime, and by two Roman lamps at night, which hung suspended from the ceiling, and cast through their pink-glass shades a pleasant glow on all

around. For a moment she paused before one of the three doors facing them, then knocked; and on a voice answering her from within, opened it, and motioned to her son to pass on.

He found himself alone with his father. Two wax candles were burning on the mantelpiece, a white frosted lamp of etruscan shape stood on the table; there was a bright wood fire on the hearth; and upon a sofa lay a gentleman whose face was so like Harold's own, that it seemed like a revelation of the future. He did not get up; but as his son approached, he pushed the reading-desk before him aside, and extended his hand.

"How are you? eh! But young people are always well, or if not, it's their own fault."

"I am quite well, thank you, sir; how are you?"

"Couldn't be worse—to be alive."

"I am sorry to hear you give so bad

an account of yourself; I had hoped Jenner might set you up."

"Never hope. But that's useless advice. Young people always do hope, eh? Never mind; never mind; all in good time. Some day you too will 'leave hope behind.'"

"I hope not, sir."

"Of course, of course; but some day you won't so hope."

Harold having nothing to say, coughed respectfully, and looked at his boots.

"The wind appears to me to be in the east," remarked his father after a minute's silence.

"Upon my word, sir, I don't know."

"Of course not; but you will some day."

The prospective advantages thus held out to him were almost too much for Harold's philosophy, but he still remained respectfully silent.

"Have you seen your mother?"

"She brought me to your room."

“Ah! yes, of course; I forgot. But you’ll forget some day too. How do you find her looking?”

Mr. Mildmay was proud of his wife, in his way, and he liked people to praise her appearance and bearing, and now he exacted this tribute from his son.

“Very well indeed, I should say,” said Harold, thinking of his mother’s loving looks, as she twined her arms about him and kissed his cheeks a few minutes ago.

“Yes; she was always handsome, and placid—placid, you know, and consistent, very consistent. Have you seen Sibyl?”

“Yes; I saw them all when I came; they were in the hall to meet me—Sibyl and Minnie and Winnie (the twins) and Sibyl’s baby—”

“Babies are a mistake.”

“And Honoria,” said Harold, without noticing the interruption.

“Ah! Honoria. Honoria is very peculiar, you know—sensible and strong-

minded. Her appearance, I consider, is unfortunate; but we can't expect all the family to turn out beauties."

"And Somers' little girl," pursued Harold, to whom these impartial criticisms were becoming embarrassing.

"Ah! Somers' little girl; extraordinary plain child; quite singular; but I don't see much of her; only it's unfortunate being a girl; but still—"

"I think, sir, I must leave you now; I have not yet dressed for dinner."

"Very true. Just ring the bell for me, will you? Thanks. Hume is too discreet to intrude. I shall see you again at dinner. Thanks. Be careful to shut the outer door; I believe your mother left it open."

Then Harold went out of the room, and just as he opened the outer door he met Hume with a can of hot water in his hand.

"Lor, Master Harold, is that you? Well, the sight of you's good for sore eyes;

it's a weary time since you went; but you'll be staying now for a while, I'll be bound, and a good thing too."

Then Harold shook hands with Hume, and that faithful retainer, mastering his emotion, and shouldering his hot-water can, walked away with a ray of joy on his puckered old face like sunlight on a withered apple. Hume had nursed Harold as a baby, and he loved his young master, and was proud of him. Whether he loved his old master, and whether he lavished pride upon him also, I cannot say; but there was a bond between them, a bond which had lasted so many years that nothing but death was likely to break it now.

Harold walked into his room and shut the door. He felt strange and yet familiar at home, as we all do after a long absence. The furniture, the carpets, the old servants, the familiar pictures, the old names and ways, and nooks and corners—almost everything, in fact, that meets the

eye seems to speak to us of old days, and of our right to a participation in all the comforts and privileges, in all the talk and interests, of home. At one moment it seems to us that we have never been away. There is the old familiar chintz, the same china ornaments; the very ink-stand and pen-wiper are the same that we knew in former years; the next, a whole army of spectres pass before us, and we feel that the years which are gone, for ever and ever gone, have taken so much with them that we are in truth strangers where once we were at home. What we see brings the past so near to us, that it is with a pang of wild regret we realise how far the things we do *not* see thrust that past away from us. When we were all together as children—ay, even as young people—had we not like joys, like sorrows, like amusements, and pleasures, and pursuits, and friends? But now—one has come hither, the other gone thither; one is pro-

sperous, the other unfortunate; some are married, some dead; some, alas! dishonoured and clean forgotten, or only spoken of in hushed whispers and with a pitiful sorrow and deprecation, worse a thousand times than forgetfulness. We have separated and gone our different paths, and lived our different lives, and hoped our personal hopes, and loved and hated, and fought and failed, and hoped again; and when we meet, after a separation of years, we are surprised that we cannot get into the old grooves, and run pleasantly on in the old way; as if those years of struggling and fighting, of doing and suffering, had not drifted us wide, wide asunder. It can never, never be again as it was in the old days; and the sooner we recognise this, and strive to find out the best way of settling down in the new, the greater our chance of happiness will be.

I do not think Harold Mildmay was conscious of such thoughts as these; but

he dimly felt that he must live himself into those divided lives again, and that he could not expect to find himself quite comfortable at first amongst old relations, who had become in some sense new to him.

“After all, I’m only a lodger,” he said, as he tied his white tie in an infinitesimally small and expert bow, and looked at the parting of his back hair by the aid of a hand-glass. “Doubtless I shall soon be *au fait*; but Honoria’s style of dress is very distressing.” Then he had gone downstairs, and had found his admiring family waiting for him in the drawing-room.

Mr. Somers was also there, and gave his brother-in-law a hearty grip of welcome. “All right, Harold, eh?” he said. Then Harold had assured him gravely that all was right, and Mr. Somers rubbed his hands, and said it was getting coldish, but seasonable. “Where’s the boy?” he asked of his wife, after a minute or two more of commonplace.

Sibyl frowned at him, for the baby was never allowed to come within earshot of her father, and then Mr. Somers immediately knew he had done wrong.

Presently Mr. Mildmay appeared, and then they went in to dinner. He gave his arm to his married daughter, Mr. Somers conducted Mrs. Mildmay, Harold and Honoria brought up the rear. "I wonder where the curate is," thought Harold, to whom that mythic personage had assumed a reality that was ridiculous, being totally without foundation. Honoria seemed very cheerful, however, without the curate; and Sibyl, who was her father's pet, was lively enough to redeem the meal from anything like dulness. As for Mrs. Mildmay, her eyes beamed every time she looked at her son; and even his father seemed pleased to see him. "Try that claret, Harold," he said, pushing the jug towards him; "too good for such youngsters as you, but you've learnt the taste,

doubtless, abroad." Harold praised the claret, and passed it to Mr. Somers, who, however, remained faithful to his port, in spite of all the ridicule his father-in-law was so obliging as to cast upon him for his unenlightened tastes.

That night, when Sibyl was undressing, her lord being already in a semi-somnolent state (for his day's work had been hard), a knock came at her bedroom-door. It was Harold. "I beg your pardon, Sibyl," he said, "but I can't go to bed without smoking my cigar; do you think there would be any objection to my smoking in the kitchen?"

"For goodness-sake, Harold, don't make such horrible jokes."

"But it's no joke, my dear; where am I to go to? all the doors are barred and bolted."

"O, but, Harold, he would never forgive you."

"Nonsense!"

“It’s not nonsense ; he has never let Frank Larkyn come here again, because he smoked out of his bedroom-window.”

“But I am not Frank Larkyn.”

“I know that.”

“What’s the good of being the son and heir if—”

“O, Harold, he will cut you off with a shilling!”

“What’s all that noise about?” asked a voice from beneath the bedclothes.

“There’s no noise. It’s Harold ; he will smoke.”

“Well, let him.”

“But—”

“Smoke is better than fire ; one would think the house was burnt down.”

“Don’t be stupid, Henry,” said Sibyl ; “Harold will believe you are encouraging him.” Then she shut the door on her brother, and came and sat down on the bed. “It’s awful!” she said ; “papa will never forgive him. Don’t snore, Henry ;

you are so unsympathising. Do wake up! Harold must get married."

"What?" said Mr. Somers; "your brother has not even slept a night at home, and you are already caballing and plotting treason against him. Intrigue, thy name is woman!"

"Such horrid habits," said Sibyl; "and he looking so nice too! Who would have thought it? but no wife would put up with it—none." Thus scheming matrimonially for her brother's benefit, pretty Sibyl fell asleep; rather disgusted than otherwise, if the truth must be told, by her husband's want of sympathy.

"Dear Harold!" were Mrs. Mildmay's last words. "Don't you find him much improved, dear?"

"He has a very good air," said the father. "But did you not think, my love, that there was a trifle too much truffle in that *vol-au-vent*?"

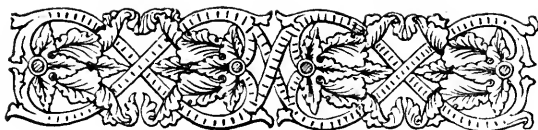
"I will tell Benson of it, to-morrow,"

she answered, and returned to her thoughts of her boy.

Honorina said her prayers with a quiet conscience, and lay down to rest at peace with the world. Harold's appearance, his manners, his good looks, his irreproachable linen, and his superlative tie, had all been observed by her; but she did not set so much value on these things as perhaps the rest of the family were inclined to do.

"Dear Harold!" she thought; "he is very agreeable; but how odd it seems to think he can do any good for his country! He seems very particular about his dress; but he is not noisy, and I am sure he does not drink. I wonder if he has given up going to church on Sundays; but of course he will do what is right here."





CHAPTER VII.

A SECOND DANIEL.

HAROLD must have smoked his cigar up the kitchen-chimney, or consumed the fumes thereof after some occult fashion unknown to the inhabitants of Brookside House; for nothing more was heard of it, to Sibyl's intense relief.

It still wanted three weeks to Christmas; and though the weather was better than it had been whilst Harold was in town, it was yet murky and dark; not cold, but rather of such a character as to make one long for a brisk wind and a hard frost. He had been detained in town a fortnight longer than he expected, having had to await Lord Brobdignag's return,

which his lordship had daily delayed, being much occupied at the time in filling game-bags in company with other noble friends devoted to the customary sports of the country during the shining hours of recess. Harold had found it somewhat difficult to while away his time during those days of waiting ; he had, however, in the interim, written to his German friend, the *savant*, at Munich, and had sent him all the Ninevite inscriptions which he had promised to send. He had also received an answer, which told him, without much circumlocution, that he had not executed his orders satisfactorily, and sent him off again to the British Museum with fresh notes and queries in his pocket.

To tell the truth, Harold was not sorry to have something to do. Othello misses his customary occupation when it's gone ; and there is no more wretched state of being than that so graphically described by the familiar phrase, of "being at a

loose end." He had again presented himself at the gates of Knowledge, but on that occasion he had come too late, and was obliged to go away unsatisfied. A few days later he returned on the same errand, was admitted, and promised the information he sought. He had not forgotten the beautiful girl with the pale cold blue eyes and the grand queenly figure, to whom he had offered his umbrella one rainy afternoon some fortnight previously. It may be doubted whether young men of his age and disposition ever do forget any pretty face within so short a time; but on the occasion of his second visit of research he saw nothing of her; for time was short, and he was scarcely able to present his credentials before the public were rung out. But on the occasion of his third visit, he had seen her again, still working at Discobolus, and still with the same abstracted quiet look in her face. She had not seen him, nor had he dared, or even wished, to make himself

known to her. He rather stood at a distant angle of a transverse gallery, watching her earnestly, and with an ever-growing surprise. To him it seemed so strange that such a young and remarkable-looking woman should be there alone. He had been used enough to see female students working away in foreign galleries and schools of art, but they, for the most part, had been dowdy, ugly, and ill-dressed; many of them no longer young, and those who were so, scarcely attractive. Such women, with lines in their faces, and ill-made clothes on their ill-made figures, might go anywhere and do anything without impropriety. The utmost they could do would be to annoy hyper-fastidious persons, like himself, by their ugliness or ungracefulness, thus made more prominently conspicuous. But this girl, this grand and beautiful creature, with her strange manner and simple dress; with her small, well-shaped head and full, harmonious figure;

what could her brothers, or father, or—husband be thinking of, to let her come thus, day after day, to a public gallery, where every bold fool or coarse knave might think himself at liberty to stare at, annoy—who knows—even speak to her? But if Harold had thought, he might have known that a fool would not recognise such beauty as hers, and that no knave could appreciate, even if he recognised it. She looked, perhaps, a trifle weary, and yet there was no absolute melancholy in her face. Once or twice she sighed, and now and then it almost seemed to Harold as if she smiled; but whether she smiled or sighed, the earnest, clear, penetrating look never faded from her face for a moment, and the light of her wondrous blue eyes remained cold as before.

The Sunday before he left town he had been taken by his friend Holsters to a fashionable church in the neighbourhood of Regent-street. It was one of the things

to be seen, and the correct thing "to do," the little Lieutenant assured him, though the season of the year was not altogether propitious, as most of the fashionable beauties, who resorted thither during the season, would be out of town. Yet, although it was at the dead season of the year, they had found the church, on their arrival, already unpleasantly crowded.

"By Jove, there's the girl Hamilton is going to marry!" said Holsters, as a lady passed him and took a chair close to where the friends were sitting; "tidy figure, and lots of tin; but not to my taste, for all that."

To this, Mildmay had not felt himself called upon to make any special reply; the tin and the figure not interesting him personally in any way. "'Pon my soul, there's the widow that every one was talking about last season; they say she's been married four times already, and has four fortunes; she's engaged now to one of the fellows attached to this church."

A tall woman in black, dressed in the height of the then prevailing fashion, passed up the aisle and sank upon the ground amidst a sea of sable draperies.

“They say the Princess comes here sometimes,” continued Holsters in an awe-struck whisper at the idea of breathing the same air with royalty; “awful bore, you know, for a married man to be separated from his wife in church; the very place where they were joined together. By George, how dark it is in here! I say, do you think it’s raining, old fellow?”

Mildmay had been silent hitherto, and now merely shook his head. He was surprised at much that met his gaze, and began to wonder whether he had come to the right place, after all. But of this there could not be much doubt, since his pioneer seemed so perfectly at home. “Monstrous style of bonnet, eh? Nuns, you know, and that sort of thing. Horrid ugly! Shouldn’t like a woman with a bonnet like

that to come and nurse me, eh? Give one the nightmare, you know, instead of doing one any good. That's one of the greatest ruffians in London," continued the ingenuous youth, as a tall handsome man with a silky yellow beard and moustache, and an irreproachable get-up, took a chair just in front of them; "beat his wife with a poker, and tied her for a week to the bed-post. She ate up all the soap in the soap-dish, and then died; since which the brute has turned pious, fasts, and confesses, and all that sort of thing." Thus he continued to prattle, till, the clergy coming in, the congregation arose as with one consent, and the service commenced. It was a grand, beautiful service—simple, solemn, and dignified; even little Holsters felt somewhat of its influence and was awed into a more quiet and reverent behaviour. This better frame of mind lasted until a young divine ascended the pulpit and forthwith plunged into his sermon. He was yet a beardless

boy ; his round young face, thick closely-cropped hair, and small regular features making him appear even much younger than he really was. In truth he had but just received priests' orders, and he was not inclined to lose any time in making his voice heard with due priestly authority. He had spent his holidays and vacations mostly abroad, frequenting, when he found himself in foreign lands, the most celebrated Jesuit preachers. He had studied the best models, and had, in some sort, caught the trick he so much admired ; in some sort, but not wholly, not entirely ; not, if the truth must be told, altogether satisfactorily. He indeed raised his hand in the air in denunciation ; he leant over the pulpit in persuasion and remonstrance ; he enounced dogmas and required obedience, and demonstrated and argued with all possible authority of tone and manner. But there were two things against him ; so much, indeed, against him, and so glaringly evi-

dent, that they pleaded his excuse even whilst they made those excuses necessary, —his youth, and his appearance. What could such a boy, with such a face, teach graybeards and men who had striven and combated the world? With what authority can the experience of twenty-five speak to fifty, sixty, seventy? —ay, even to thirty or forty? A second Daniel, if he come to judgment at all, must come with some more authority and some wider experience than a round face and a conventional manner (formed though it may be on the best models) can give. However advanced a state of piety may be his, it ill befits so young a man to lay down the law to graybeards and saints of older standing than himself; still less is he likely to persuade or terrify sinners.

Mildmay listened in his usual impassive way, and wondered at the patience of the men and women who, listening to the sermon,

“ sat on, divinely flustered,
Sniffing (he thought) its dew of Hermon,
With such content in every snuffle
As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.”

He glanced at a venerable white-haired clergyman who sat near the choir, and marvelled at his long-suffering patience. Then he turned his eyes upon the youthful preacher again with a yet acuter surprise at his assurance and authoritative tone. “They manage these things better abroad,” he thought, remembering the calm quiet faces that he had seen in distant pulpits; the finished manner, the air of asceticism, and the halo of benevolence and long-suffering surrounding some of those noble heads. He had a vision of a noble enthusiasm and a grand authority; of eyes glowing with faith and kindling with inspiration; of voices in whose metallic vibration, in whose persuasive pleading, there lay untold tales, unscanned volumes of fiery temptations and cruel ordeals, of dark experiences and divine love, of end-

less self-denial and willing martyrdom ; and then—why then he thought how wretched are poor copies and bad imitations ; and in his impatience made a movement as though to get out of his chair, and so escape from such futile thunders as were now reverberating in his ears. As he moved, Holsters touched him. “ Look at the sixth chair of the third row,” he said ; and Mildmay, out of very weariness, followed his friend’s behest, saw a cloak and a shoulder which seemed familiar to him, but the face belonging to which, he could not, by reason of his position, at present scan. The dress and cloak were not unlike those of the “ Sisters,” upon whose appearance Holsters had made such free and uncomplimentary remarks ; but those ladies had brought with them into church a number of small children, whom they had conducted to a remote part of the building, and had then, with their charges, been lost to sight. A slight movement on the part of one of his neighbours made a

gap, and then Grace Hepburn's face met his gaze. Always the same. She now looked steadily at the young preacher; a clear, quiet, inexpressive gaze; giving no evidence of interest or disgust, of weariness or ridicule, or reprobation. If any one feeling predominated over another in Grace's mind at that moment, it was, like Mildmay's, that of wonder that so young a man, with so young a face, could have the assurance to speak before his elders and betters in so authoritative a manner. She, also, had seen other things, and could not help considering such youthful prominence a mistake. Just at that precise moment, however, she was contemplating the young enthusiast's countenance from an artistic point of view, and speculating as to whether time and sorrow, temptations, trials, and experience, could ever give dignity and manliness to that round head and those short and insignificant, if regular, features.

Mildmay had seen her. Fate, chance,

what you will, had brought her once again in his way. The young man's sermon no longer appeared wearisome to him; he "thought of Ruth the beautiful" a few seats behind him, and wished that the youthful preacher would go on for ever.

The service was over. They were standing outside, the two friends, as though they were anxiously expecting to meet some one. Holsters did not long conceal his motive for so waiting; "There comes my cousin, Norah Lemnox," he said to Harold; "that jolly little girl with the black eyes and neat boots; there, with that savage old spinster in a poke."

The cousins nodded confidentially at each other, but the lieutenant dared not brave the Argus-eyed governess, and Norah passed quietly on without any vocal greeting.

Harold's eyes wandered from the young, thin, undeveloped beauty to the grave, earnest face that was just coming from be-

neath the porch into the damp cold light of the short winter's day. Their eyes also met; and a slight blush rose to Grace's face as he raised his hat in recognition. She bowed slightly—so slightly, that to him it seemed as though she had scarcely acknowledged his salutation.

“Why that's the invisible girl again,” exclaimed Holsters; “she seems to be everywhere; but you must know her well to bow to her first.”

“I don't know her at all.”

“Then you are a cool hand.”

“How so?”

“Why, she would never have noticed you, if you hadn't done the civil thing in such a marked way.”

Then Mildmay remembered that it is only abroad gentlemen have the privilege of bowing first; and the blush, which had in no wise displeased him, he now put down to annoyance at what might have appeared like impertinence.

“Come along,” said Holsters ; and he came along accordingly. “We shall just be in time to see Norah before that old dragon shuts the door upon her.”

But they scarcely got more than a glimpse of the skirts of her clothing.

“After all, you only saw her ankles,” said Harold.

“Well, that’s better than nothing. But what do you think of the whole thing?”

“What whole thing?”

“Why, the candles, and vestments, and incense, and so on.”

“I have not yet thought about them at all.”

“The sermon?”

“Pray don’t ask my opinion of that young gentleman who was so abusive.”

“He’s quite a shining light amongst them. All the girls ask him to confess them; and I’m told at Easter they crowd round him in flocks and herds to see how he has borne all the fasting.”

“H’m,” said Harold, to whom this sort of talk was rather a bore than otherwise; “if you’ll excuse me, I think I’ll say good-bye. I want to look-up a fellow I know hereabouts.”

“Ta-ta. I suppose you’ll look in at the Club some time this afternoon?”

But Harold met other friends in his homeward course; and on the Monday he had, as we have seen, gone down to Brookside (after a highly satisfactory interview with Lord Brobdignag), and had been received once more into the bosom of his family.

Grace, as she walked homewards, was not altogether comfortable. She had met the stranger whose civility had already cost her so much annoyance; she had blushed at his recognition, not because she felt shy at being noticed, but because of certain thoughts which involuntarily arose in her mind as she returned his bow. Harold might have been bald, lame, and fifty-five,

for all the thought she bestowed upon him for his own sake ; but he reminded her of other things, and her thoughts on the subject were not altogether agreeable ones. She said nothing to her father, however, of the encounter ; for he had as yet scarcely got over his former irritation.





CHAPTER VIII.

RETROSPECTIVE.

AFTER Mr. Hepburn's violent outbreak, Grace had thought it more prudent to remain for a time at home, working steadily at her oil-paintings as far as the short and foggy days would allow of such work, and passing the evenings with her father, plying her needle with nimble fingers, and listening to his reminiscences with feelings of delight. He was calm again; and thus the period of her voluntary seclusion was a happy one to Grace, to whom the sight of his anger was always distressingly painful. They had not many books; and novels and new literature were entirely beyond their reach. A guinea

a year—which is a wonderfully moderate sum when it represents a subscription for most of the current wisdom, and all the current folly of the day—was yet too large a one for the Hepburns to expend in a luxury so beguiling as books. Grace, notwithstanding that she had a tolerable amount of resolution when duty required it, could yet surely never have gone on painting so perseveringly in her garret, if she had known that a sensation heroine was waiting for her in the dingy little sitting-room below, and that a whole army of critics were employed in cutting that fascinating female up into mincemeat so small that not one of her florid charms should ever be recognisable again. It was good, indeed, for both Mr. Hepburn and his daughter that their little stock of old-fashioned volumes sufficed them; otherwise, though they might have enjoyed the “feast of reason and the flow of soul” from the sources I have mentioned, yet it is to be

feared that they would have been stinted in their bread-and-butter. The Attic salt of all the wits in Christendom would scarcely have flavoured their porridge, had they been reduced to that frugal fare; nor could literary varieties have compensated to them for the monotony of such a diet.

But Mr. Hepburn was a good linguist. He had spent so much of his life abroad, that French, German, and Italian were familiar to his tongue; Grace had also a fair smattering of all three languages: so that when Herr Bender brought up his weekly *Art Journal* for them to read (and he was scrupulously punctual in this matter), she was able to make all the German text intelligible to her father, though she would scarcely have ventured to speak a word in his native language to the young mechanician. Now and then a stray French or German novel would also find its way upstairs; though these Grace had to enjoy by surreptitious snatches at odd moments to

herself; for Mr. Hepburn had no longer patience for love-tales. All the books they possessed were relics of former days, when money had not been so scarce as it now was, and when Hepburn would buy a volume at a time to read aloud to his young wife during their happy evenings. Scott was there in full force, prose and poetry (it was the fashion in those days to read Scott), and Byron and Shelley (whom it was the fashion then to revile); Burns and Moore, and Milton and Shakespeare (of course), were also there; and even the gentle Keats, and all the poets of the lake school; though these latter Grace did not greatly affect, declaring herself wearied by Wordsworth's insipidity, and in no wise lending a favourable ear to Shelley's extravagances, or Coleridge's weird stories of lovely enchanted ladies, and unfortunate old seamen who ought by rights to have been pensioned off in Greenwich Hospital with a comfortable retiring allowance of

grog and tobacco. A volume of Tennyson was also there (but only one); and Longfellow's poems stood next to it on the shelf. As was natural, these were Grace's favourites; and in her walks to and from the Museum she would gaze longingly through the windows of a bookseller's shop at the gorgeous edition of *Maude* and *In Memoriam*, the *Idyls of the King*, and the *Princess*. She knew nothing of these books; for, as has already been seen, reviews and magazines were quite beyond her reach; but that only made her longing to read them the more intense; and she would stand staring at their titles, and trying to imagine what the gorgeous bindings held within—what gems of thought, what pearls of poesy—with an eagerness that was akin to tears; for all the time she knew that these delights were as much beyond her reach as though they were contributing their brilliance to the adornment of some New York "store."

Books of history stood also on the little chiffonier, neatly ranged according to their binding; but it is to be feared that Grace seldom took down these chronicles of defunct kings and queens and warriors and statesmen; for her father was a walking encyclopædia of knowledge, and the utmost use she ever made of them was, perhaps, in his absence, to turn over the pages in search of some particular period of history, some dramatic or tragic event, which she had seen immortalised, perchance, in a grand historical painting or fine engraving, to which she now required the key. Her education had been desultory, and what she knew, she had learned more from intercourse with her father, and from travel, than from regular methodical study pursued on any special plan or system. She herself often bitterly deplored this, and was wont to rank herself very low amongst women, thinking at times that it was perhaps fortunate fate had denied her much

feminine intercourse, and thus mercifully spared her the pain of those comparisons which she felt sure must fall out so greatly to her disadvantage. She was apt to overrate the advantages that other girls enjoyed, and to underrate her own. To her it seemed that she had been always beginning and never ending anything; always travelling, and never attaining a resting-place; always attempting, and never succeeding; always growing up, but never reaching that full womanly stature, that completion and fulfilment, which in other girls of her age seemed to come as a matter of course.

She forgot the immense advantage of intercourse with such a mind as her father's; she did not reckon the inestimable value of travel, nor did she for a moment imagine that all she had seen and heard had been gradually, but surely, opening her mind and educating her heart. She envied every school-miss her parrot-like catalogue of

dates, and her mechanical chatter of geography and babble of grammar; whilst she herself knew many a choice anecdote, many a historical fact, many a poetical inspiration, which would have been subjects of mystification to the giggling girls whose advantages she coveted.

All that she had seen (and it was not little, for in all the Italian cities of note the Hepburns had sojourned at various times, exploring the treasures of art they contained with an enthusiasm that never flagged; nor had they been more apathetic in their German wanderings)—all that she had seen had been gradually opening and forming her mind for the reception of future knowledge; and that which the envied schoolmisses would never have understood, she was able to take in at a glance, and comprehend as it were by intuition. Yet it is not to be denied that her education had been desultory, and that in some matters she was behind others of her sex and age.

Grace had known no intimate female companionship except that of her mother. For that sweet, gentle, lovely woman she had cherished (as did almost all who came within the magic circle of her influence) an affection that verged on adoration. In this, father and daughter had, from the very earliest years of the latter, entirely sympathised; and it would be difficult to say which had been most overwhelmed by the blow, when, after long years of feebleness and delicacy, counteracted by the most watchful care, it fell at last, and their hearth was left unto them desolate.

Grace had been stunned; but she was the first to rise. Then had come that terrible fever, during which she had nursed her father with a devotion that was but another name for an agony of apprehension, a frenzy of fear, lest he too should be taken, and she left to buffet the world alone. But he recovered his health, and lost his sight. Recovered it, at least, par-

tially; for Hepburn was never again the man he had been before his sweet wife's death, and now never could be the same again. To Grace, who had been hourly dreading his death, this loss of sight appeared a very secondary evil; she had him still to walk by her side, to guide and counsel her; she had him still to tend and cherish, to console and protect and love. For him she felt the loss to be a very terrible one; for herself it was as nothing compared with the loss she had taught herself to look upon, not only as possible, but as probable. She was deeply grateful, and though her religion was, perhaps, not of that rigidly orthodox school which is now in the ascendant, her thanks to God were quite as hearty as (possibly much heartier than) if they had been enunciated according to prescribed formulas. The girl had a great, strong, brave, loving heart, and her thanksgivings were as warm as her pleadings had been passionate.

And then the blow had not come upon them suddenly. They had both hoped; had travelled hither and thither, going from one physician to another, ever looking for better news than the last was able to give them, for cheerier prospects than those that more immediately lay before them.

But there had come a term to their wanderings; there had come a day when their little funds were well nigh exhausted, and when hope was beginning to give way to despair.

Then a great German physician whom they had consulted had given them a note to his distinguished countryman (that countryman who had either been expatriated, or who had of his own free will become an Englishman), and the Hepburns had come to London and sought out Dr. Sternfels. "If any man can cure you, he can," the great German medicus had said, as he gave the letter of introduction into Hepburn's hand; and the poor man caught at the

straw of hope, and floated awhile longer on the waters that should soon overwhelm him.

On Dr. Sternfels had devolved the painful task of telling the poor believer in his skill, that in his case the cunning of an operator's hand was useless.

Kindly cruel, Max Sternfels, after a word or two of preparation, had uncompromisingly told his patient the definitive truth, that he was hopelessly, incurably blind !

Perpetual night should be now his portion ; eternal darkness and solitariness and dependence his lot. And how should he give his child bread ? how gain enough to keep body and soul together ? For he had spent all his substance on doctors, but the spending had been in vain ; and now, cheated of his last hope, the only thing that he saw was starvation, like some grim spectre, staring him in the face.

But Grace kept a good heart, and in spite of all things was not afraid.

They had remained in London. In truth they knew not whither to go, and England's earth held her for whom they had so lately mourned. To Hepburn all places were now of necessity alike. Relations they had none, for it was years since he had heard anything of his brother; and the news which he then learnt had been gathered by him from a public journal. It told of his marriage, some two years before Hepburn's own wedding; and a year later he saw that a child had been born to his brother at Hepburn Manor.

His young wife had also no near relatives. She had on the death of her mother been sent to her uncle in Florence, and had remained with him up to the time of her marriage. After that, he too had died, and all communication with England had ceased. But young Mrs. Hepburn's childhood had been tended by a faithful nurse, who had brought the child to Florence, and given her into her uncle's hands, with

many tears and lamentations, not unmingled with recommendations and adjurations of a warning character, which had completely mystified the simple old man. He had, indeed, begged the woman to stay with him, offering any wages that she chose to ask, and plaintively bewailing his ignorance as to the requirements of children. But she had refused all his offers, saying that if her love for the child could not make her remain in foreign parts, no greed of gold should do it. In truth the woman was a rabid Protestant, and the sight of all the papistry that surrounded her was alike terrifying and exasperating to her outraged feelings. The priests and monks and nuns; the processions and ceremonies, the prostrations, and genuflexions, and crossings, were abominations in her sight, and unsavoury in her nostrils. She regarded every hour spent on Italian ground as imperilling the salvation of her soul; and if she had known any formula for exorcising

the heathen mysteries she beheld with such horror, all her time would have been spent in seeking to counteract the evil influences surrounding her.

“If that blessed lamb should turn to heathen ways, the sin will be on your head, sir, as I makes bold to say, which says it as perhaps in other countries didn’t ought.”

The simple old artist soul had gazed at her wonderingly, and had begun to realise more sensibly than he had ever done before the proverbial eccentricity of his country people, descending even into this grade of society. What she had said about heathenism he supposed to apply in some way to his Art,—to the nymphs and goddesses, to the fauns and satyrs, and naiads and dryads adorning his studio; but he had entered into no argument with the honest irrational woman before him, contenting himself with promising to do his best for his sister’s orphan child. So nurse had departed; and little Grace was

left sitting amongst the marble blocks, gazing up at her uncle with mystified wonder as he wielded hammer and chisel.

The old sculptor had never troubled himself much about theology. Long custom had brought with it unconscious reverence for the forms of religion by which he was surrounded; and he raised his cap reverently when processions passed him in the street, and crossed himself with holy-water as mechanically as the most orthodox Catholic could have done, when he went to mass. This, indeed, he did by no means regularly; but at great festivals he was always to be seen kneeling devoutly on the marble pavement of the church of San Paolo, which holy edifice he specially affected because it was near his dwelling, and further enjoyed the advantage of being dedicated to his own patron saint.

Every Sunday he made little Grace read some chapters out of her English Bible to him; though to his ear, accustomed to the

sweet Italian tongue, our rude accents—even from childish lips—appeared as in-harmonious and unpolished as he declared his fellow-countrymen's ideas on art to be. After such readings, he regularly repeated the same formula to the little golden-haired maiden at his knee. "Thanks, my child. Always read your Bible; for you know we are Protestants." Beyond this weekly protestation, however, no evidence of the fact would have been found in the good old man's life; and to Grace the words conveyed no meaning whatever; for she had not yet arrived at the age of inquiry. Once, indeed, her uncle had taken her to hear the English service read by a British chaplain; but the result had not been satisfactory. A man with a profusion of oily hair, a signet-ring, a nasal twang, and a sheet pinned round his neck with a hair-pin by way of surplice, was not exactly an object to inspire Grace with enthusiasm for the religion of her forefathers; and, in-

deed, the poor old uncle was somewhat abashed, when, the dreary function over, he found himself again in the sunny streets with his pretty little niece.

He was quite unable to answer her many questions, and was embarrassed at finding himself so ignorant of Protestantism.

“Do not let us go to mass at the Protestant priest’s again,” little Grace had said, in an innocent jumble of jargon; and, in truth, her reverent young soul had been pained at the baldness, and meagreness, and meanness of the manner of worship in vogue amongst “Protestants.” She did not understand the wide gulf fixed between the two forms, nor would she have been able to comprehend how lost a sheep she herself would have seemed to Protestant eyes, could they have witnessed her mass-goings.

The tender Virgin-mother and her beautiful large-eyed Babe were objects of won-

der and delight to the little girl, as also were all the graceful idolatries by which she was surrounded. Yet, when the time came that Warren Hepburn had already laid his devotion at her feet (though as yet he had not openly declared his love), it was with a feeling of pride and pleasure that, in answer to his observation, "I am not a Roman Catholic," she had been able to answer in the old formula, "And we too are Protestants." It was like the famous *Ed anch' io* of the old painter.

Wherein her Protestantism lay, Hepburn did not inquire. He had travelled too much to be shocked at any differences of form, or to be inclined to split straws on shades of creed; but he was glad that the young girl held—so she declared—the same faith as himself. It was the correct thing. "All Englishmen," so Hepburn told himself, "were Protestants. His father and mother had been Protestants; he himself was one; and it was good that his young

wife should be one also." Thus they had been married by an English clergyman, and the question of religion once for ever laid at rest between them.

In later days Grace had declared the whitewash piety in vogue amongst the "protesting" was abhorrent to her feelings, and she had consequently declined, when in England, attending the dreary gatherings which were dignified by the name of "services," and eschewed the privilege of "sitting under" a gentleman whose flowery eloquence and Johnsonian periods were quite beyond her simple comprehension. Again, in still later days, the Anglican church had gathered her into its fold once more, and her last moments found consolation in the ministrations of a holy man, whose eloquence was of a simple character, and whose periods were not Johnsonian.

Now that Grace, the daughter, was alone with her father, she did not often get to church; for, though Sunday was a

day of rest to her, she could not let it be one of loneliness to him; and nothing would have induced him to suffer himself to be led out, an object of pity and curiosity to the smart Sunday folks, in the glare of noonday sunshine. Sometimes, of course, Grace did leave him; but it was when she knew that Herr Bender would come up and spend the quiet Sunday morning with her father.

In the summer afternoons and evenings, when the days were long, she would also occasionally escape, and go gliding through the quiet streets in her dark dress, feeling solitary and sad, as the family groups passed her, or as she heard the gay prattle of children, or the happy suppressed laughter of young couples walking arm-in-arm. Hers was a strange, lonely, self-contained life; and at such times the yearning for her departed mother would arise in her heart with a painful intensity of longing, to which the only relief was in tears. She

would walk homewards soothed and calmed by the beautiful holy-day services, with the songs of the singing-boys still sounding in her ears, and the beautiful altar-flowers blooming again in her breast, in the form of fervent thankofferings for all that her life still held dear. Through the dusky streets, between the rows of dark houses, looking up at the purple heavens, and gazing at the stars, her heart full of memories, of hopes, of courage, and high resolves, Grace would walk. At such moments the world was far from her, and she felt happy in her abstraction. Even the strong earthly love which beat quickly in her warm young heart—even all her enthusiastic projects, all her devotion to art, all her courage and eagerness, seemed to be sanctified in that sacred hour to something higher and holier, purer and more intense, than mere earthly love and courage, devotion and enthusiasm, can of themselves be. Vague visions of eternal beauty breathed on her soul;

but the eager eyes were downcast, and the eager feet stayed; for she felt that the place whereon she stood was holy ground.

Coming home, she would find her father waiting to walk with her round the quiet squares; and she would slip her arm within his, and lead him gently forward into the mild summer night. Then she would perhaps tell him of the music which she had heard, of the sermon, and of the glory and dignity of the flower-crowned altar. At such times she could speak warmly and eagerly; but her father listened, and made no sign. His affliction was as yet too grievous to him, and in silence he still rebelled as fiercely as ever.

But in these short November days such evening church-goings were impossible to Grace; and seeing his ruffled frame of mind, she had kept very much at home.

They had been living some time in Rosstock-crescent, and Grace often wondered if,

after all their wanderings, she was destined to live and die there.

Mrs. Boxer was no other than her mother's old nurse—now a stout bustling woman of nearly seventy, hale and hearty, and with a kind heart beating in her ample old bosom. She had never quite lost sight of her young mistress; and when Mrs. Hepburn came to England, she had sought out her old nurse, who was then living at Kensington, having married a market-gardener.

But the market-gardening days were now over, and Mrs. Boxer had come down in the world; her husband was dead, and she lived by letting her small lodgings at a low rent, and by occasionally going out to cook in great houses when extra hands were wanted.

To have gone to such lodgings, and to have been treated as lodgers ordinarily are by the proprietors of such houses, would have been torture to Grace's proud, sensi-

tive spirit, and wrath and fury unbounded to her father's now irritable one. But Mrs. Boxer could scarcely have treated them with more respect had they spent a hundred shillings where they demurred at spending one. Her young mistress had died in her arms, and now all the old love and affection seemed to have descended on the husband's and daughter's heads. Thus Grace had much trouble and drudgery taken off her hands; and the more she was able to do for them, the greater and more fervent waxed Mrs. Boxer's love for her lodgers. She was particular that no noisy bachelors should come to take up their abode in her parlour apartments, making night hideous with their revelry, and themselves uproarious by their libations. Herr Bender, it is true, was a bachelor, but he was a quiet bachelor, neither given to late hours, nor to noisy companions, nor to strong drinks; he paid his way regularly, and had never

owed his laundress anything. So, though she objected as a rule to foreigners, she had allowed this young man to take up his abode beneath her orderly roof-tree, and to set up his gods in peace. Of what gods, and also of what goddesses, he set up, we shall have presently to speak; but for the present we will not further occupy ourselves with those divinities.

Thus a week passed, and Sunday came round again. Grace, seated by the fire in her best dress, a dark brown garment, void of adornment, but fitting closely to her lithe round figure, and finished by a neat linen collar and cuffs, looked pale, and a trifle sad. The weather was dark and gloomy, and though it had ceased to rain, the atmosphere was still murky. There came so little change to this young life, so little intercourse with the outer world, that it was no wonder if at times a certain stillness fell upon Grace, a cer-

tain numbness and dumbness, of which she herself was painfully conscious, but from which she found it impossible to rouse herself. At such times she would sit and wonder stupidly why she felt so dull; if other people, young girls of her own age, ever felt so; if she were destined so to feel for ever? It was not discontent with her lot, nor was it a rebellion against the trials that had come to overshadow her dark life; it was more a stagnation of power and will, a deadness and numbness of energy and hope. For, unlovely and ungraceful as her life may seem to us, Grace, in her healthy moments, was still full of hopes and aspirations. But to-day even thought was a trouble to her, and her mind refused to think, or in any way to do active duty.

“You are going to church to-day, Miss Grace?” said Mrs. Boxer, as she opened the window, and shook the crumbs

off the table-cloth into the dingy little garden below.

“I think not, nurse.”

Grace said “nurse” from habit, as her mother also had done up to the day of her death, and the old woman’s heart rejoiced in the fond name.

“You didn’t ought to let Miss Grace sit so much at home, sir.”

Mr. Hepburn, thus attacked, did not know what to say, and therefore wisely kept silence.

“I really do not care to go, nurse,” Grace answered listlessly.

“But you ought to care, Miss ; you’d be all the cheerfuller for a brisk walk, and it never did any one harm to go to church yet.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” said Mr. Hepburn smiling, and now speaking for the first time.

“But I am not going, papa.”

“It would do you good, Miss Grace,

even though you don't think it a duty, and the walk would bring some colour into your cheek, which is not like a young lady's, but as pale as any poor factory girl's."

"Are you pale, Grace? Do you feel ill?"

"I am never very rosy, papa; and as to being ill—well, I am as well as usual."

The listless weariness of Grace's voice could not but strike her father.

"You must go to church," he said, with sudden inconsistency. "Mrs. Boxer is right; it is a duty."

"Which, not meaning any offence, is likewise my opinion, sir."

"It will do me no good, papa."

"I am not so sure of that," said Mr. Hepburn for the second time, and in seeming contradiction to his first expressed doubts on the subject.

"I would rather stay with you, papa."

"And I had rather you went out. No

one will have an opportunity of offering you an umbrella to-day, for it is not raining; and no one will venture to speak to you if you carry a prayer-book in your hand, and look as though you were going to church."

Grace blushed. Her father had not yet forgotten the umbrella episode; and yet his remembrance of it was not the cause of her blushing. She had private reasons (or feelings) of her own for colouring-up like a rosebud at the allusion. But even now, though Mrs. Boxer's eyes were fixed on her in surprise, she would not let her father run away with a wrong opinion, reasserting it until it assumed all the stability of positive fact in his mind.

"The offering of that umbrella was not rudely meant," she said, "nor was it impertinently done. I was foolish not to mention it to you at the time; but it was also very stupid of Herr Bender to speak of it in the way he did."

“I do not see that, my dear; but I have observed that you are often unjust to Herr Bender; that you do not like him.”

Grace blushed again, this time somewhat conscience-stricken. “I know he is very clever, and very good and kind, papa; but I hate that abstracted, dreamy, sentimental sort of people. Herr Bender would be much more admirable in my eyes, if he made clocks and watches, and useful instruments, instead of elaborating all sorts of speculative, useless, imaginary theories, and impossible abstract ideas.”

“You are very unreasonable, then. The man is a deep thinker, and has read much and well. His sort is only to be found in Germany; and though such men would not do for active life, yet they too are of use in their generation.”

“I do not care for people who bury their talents in a napkin,” said Grace.

“I do not think he can be fairly said to bury his talents in a napkin. He is skilful

and industrious in his *métier*, bringing all his knowledge and varied information to bear on new discoveries and new ideas. The peculiar kind of learning which he possesses would not qualify him for any of the learned professions, even were these open to him. His knowledge is too varied, and his studies too miscellaneous, to be of much practical use to him. But long before his father died, he was forced to adopt his present calling; and, as far as I see, is satisfied with it."

"Surely it is a pity that so much talent should be wasted."

"I do not think that it may fairly be called wasted. Sternfels himself has often told me, that without Bender many of his most brilliant discoveries and useful inventions would never have existed. It seems to me that immense patience and scrupulous perseverance are qualities not often found united with keen intelligence and modest industry."

“O papa, what a partisan you are!”

“O Grace, what a prejudiced person you are!”

“Not prejudiced, only just.”

“Not just—only—ungenerous.”

Again Grace blushed, for the third time this morning; but Mrs. Boxer, finding the conversation soaring beyond the regions in which she ordinarily dwelt, had long since departed with the tablecloth; and so Grace blushed “unseen,” and without any special vexation.

“As you are going to church, I will ask Bender to come up and have a chat with me.”

“Am I going?”

“It will do you good.”

“Very well, papa, if you think so, I will go.”

When Grace came into the room again to kiss her father before going out, Herr Bender already sat by the fire warming his delicate hands. He was talking eagerly,

and there was a bright spot on each cheek. As Grace opened the door, he turned his head, and sprang quickly to his feet, with some muttered apology for having drawn his chair so unceremoniously near the fire; "and for talking so loud," he added; "but I thought Mr. Hepburn told me you had already gone to church."

"Not gone—only going; but pray do not apologise," said Grace, with a feeble attempt at cordiality in her manner.

She could not bear loud talking, and he knew it. But altogether there was something apologetic and deprecatory in his manner towards her. He felt that she did not like him—that he was there on sufferance—that he was endured for her father's sake, not liked for his own. Grace was always polite to him, but never cordial. He could not account to himself for the knowledge of her feelings. In such cases these things are instinctively felt; we all know where we are liked and loved; and

in the sunny atmosphere of affection and sympathy we open and expand, offering all the flowers and perfumes of our glowing hearts in return for the genial kindly rays of warmth that have shone upon them. We all feel instinctively the dislike that is not spoken, nor even hinted at, much less positively expressed; we shiver and withdraw into ourselves, like a sensitive plant at the rude touch of man; all perfume is gone; the blast has passed over us, and left us cold and withered, shrinking and colourless, and with a feeling of chill pain at our hearts, that makes us resentfully dumb.

Herr Bender stood holding the back of his chair, conscious of such a chill, and speaking in a tone of voice that told of some inward suppressed pain. She stood opposite to him, with her beautiful, proud, pale face and her great clear gray-blue eyes; and all the time he was longing, passionately longing, to throw himself at

her feet with a wild, insane cry of love and adoration, that made his heart beat by its very temerity. But Grace saw none of this; and it was well for him that she did not.

“I am going, father; good-bye;” and she stooped down to kiss him, buttoning her glove at the same time, whilst she held her prayer-book under her arm.

“Do not be so resigned, my dear.”

“One must be, to the inevitable.”

“Fancy a young lady going to a bonnet-show, and talking of her fate as inevitable!” said Mr. Hepburn to Bender.

“Ah, Miss Hepburn despises bonnets, perhaps.”

“No, I do not despise bonnets; I even like looking at those which are pretty, and go so far, occasionally, as to wish one or the other, more especially becoming, were mine.”

Here would have been a fine opportunity for Bender to pay her some ingenious compliment about “unadorned beauty,”

&c. &c.; but no such glib words came to his tongue. He simply stood gazing at her with eyes that were moody, and a heart full of passion, and the sense of his own folly bitterly strong within him.

“Good-bye, child.”

“Good-bye, papa.”

“Pray for us.” (*Us!*)

“If the bonnets will let me.”

“Well, they may well prove too much for your philosophy — by all accounts,” added Hepburn, with something between a smile and a sigh.

“Or rather, for my religion. Good-bye.”

She was gone! Perhaps, on the whole, it was a relief to him. The pain was so acute, the pleasure so doubtful, that many a time and often he had sworn to himself he would keep away and see her face no more, lest the sweet madness within him should betray itself, and he be banished for ever from the light of her presence. But

for such wounds as these, neither time nor absence are healers. Away from her, he thought continually of her; of every trick of her face, of every tone of her voice, of every turn of her head, of the touch of her hand, of her hair and her dress, of the little white collar round her throat, of her graceful movements and quiet ways. He would sit in the little parlour below, listening for her step overhead; he would picture her to himself sitting on her little low chair, her hands busy with needlework, or holding a book in them, so that the glimmering firelight fell on the pages, while she read her father to sleep in the twilight. He saw her coming and going; he knew when she was busy in her little garret painting industriously by the dim light of the short winter's day; and then he felt as though she were very far off. But when she came down the little rickety wooden staircase, and went into her room to wash her hands, he was glad again, and his

ears listened eagerly for every movement above.

When she went to bed, and when she got up, he knew; and when she knelt down to say her prayers, he knew it also. Reverently he would bow his head in his hands, and sit silently awaiting the moment when her step would again tell of her finished devotions. The great gulf between them was ever present to him. But this did not prevent him from being bitterly, passionately jealous. Some undefined feeling of this kind had made him speak of the young man who had sheltered her under his umbrella; and the satisfaction he had imbibed from her father's angry reproof was by no means incompatible with the deep love he bore her. He knew the folly of it; he, who would scarcely have dared to touch the hem of her garment, who trembled when her dress, in passing by, swept against him; who lost all presence of mind in *her* presence, and

became a low-born, ill-bred man of the people before her calm, quiet grace; he knew that he could never speak of his love; never tell her of it; never hope that she would listen; never dream that she could return it. And yet he loved her; loved her so intensely, that he was, as Heine says, "though unloved, a god;" for all things had a touch divine for him in those days; and her voice was like heavenly music, and her laughter like celestial melody.

As he drew his chair near the fire again, he resumed, with a violent effort, the thread of the conversation where it had been dropped, reserving all sweeter thoughts for solitary moments.

Grace, who, for a second had awakened to something like vivacity, was now walking along the New Road weighed down by the nameless oppression which so steadfastly beset her. She looked neither to the right nor to the left; the outer world had

vanished ; she was again communing with her own heart, and walking on through the long, ugly, half-deserted streets like one in a dream.





CHAPTER IX.

MAX STERNFELS.

R. STERNFELS sat in his study with Bender's calculations before him. He was deep in thought; not in personal thought, but travelling after that idea which had taken him to the young mechanic's house, endeavouring to trace it back to its source, and to dive down into the mysterious depths of the well at the bottom of which he hoped to find the truth he was seeking, the first faint glimmering of which had suggested the calculations he held in his hand, and at which he from time to time glanced, as though the numbers were signposts to guide him on his way. He had

given the hopes of his youth, the strength of his manhood, the earnest, enduring love of his heart, the energy of his soul, to Science. He had given her the best powers of his mind, and he was also minded to give to her all the rest of his life. He had no place for the smaller affections, the more personal interests, the petty objects that fill out, and make the sum and substance of other men's lives. To his love for mankind he sacrificed all closer attachments, as from man to man, all more genial friendships. In his devotion to science, the love of woman was forgotten. He had no time, no place for such things; and, indeed, he felt no want of the more intimate affections, of the graceful tendernesses of life.

All that had been sacrificed long ago. He had, in his early youth, also dreamt his short dream of romance, but that was long, long ago now; forgotten except as a fact (and Dr. Sternfels never forgot facts), but incapable of arousing the slightest emotion in him

at this distance of time ; unless, perhaps, a passing emotion of gratitude that he should have escaped a fate which would have been so uncongenial to him and so fatal to his pursuits. He was a man who never wasted time in vain regrets. He made up his mind to a plan of action, persevered in it, battled with the enemy, overcame it, and finally conquered, or—was conquered. But the latter contingency did not often occur; for Dr. Sternfels was not a man to undertake anything that was *likely* to beat him in the long-run. Baffled he might be, and often was, but never discouraged, never convinced that success was impossible to him, until his understanding clearly told him that he was finally defeated. He was a man who, at a superficial glance, appeared incapable of any enthusiasm. I doubt whether any one had ever seen him enthusiastic on any subject; I do not believe that he ever lost that well-balanced, well-assured manner which seemed to re-

move him so far from common men. He appeared cold, unsympathetic; one felt that he looked over the heads of the units, over hundreds of thousands, and that his gaze did not rest longer on the one than on the other.

Let us look at him whilst he sits at his writing-table, unconscious of our gaze. First a general impression, and then a more detailed analysis. The figure is somewhat above the middle height; broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and remarkable for the smallness of its delicate hands. (Of his skill as an operator many a poor wretch could tell.) The face is dark, and healthily pale. The general impression is one of self-reliance, energy, strength, and an indomitable will. Look at the face more narrowly; watch its changes of expression; and you will find reasons for all your general impressions, and see that they are in the main correct. The head is beautifully formed, and covered with

thick, closely curling, short, dark hair; the forehead is remarkably full and wide; the nose is slightly aquiline, with nervous, sensitive nostrils; the eyes are gray—cold, clear, and bright; the mouth is perfectly formed—not too small, and expressive of immense determination; the short upper lip, and firmly modelled chin, which is cleft in the centre—as one often sees in antique statues—gives a certain air of pride to the face. Regular features are apt to be hard, and are always cold unless softened by mobility of expression or by very beautiful and brilliant colouring. Dr. Sternfel's face was redeemed from hardness by the wonderful flexibility of his features, but it was a cold face for all that; not proud, or haughty, or contemptuous, but still scarcely sympathetic; suggestive of immense self-control on the one hand, and a want of enthusiasm on the other. When he smiled, one saw that his teeth were regular and white; but he smiled rarely,

for his occupations were for the most part of a grave nature, and the turn of his mind not jocular. Humour he possessed abundantly; but he relieved himself of the possession so gravely that few people surmised the fact. His own relish, however, of the shots he occasionally fired off was much heightened by often seeing that those he had hit did not even know they were wounded.

He was patient, grave, earnest, minutely conscientious in whatever he undertook. He would be as scrupulously careful in the treatment of an insignificant case of illness, such as any country apothecary could easily have cured, as he would be by the bedside of some terrible example of the obscure and horrible sufferings to which our poor human flesh is heir. But one instinctively felt that as soon as the relationship of doctor and patient ceased, all other relationship would cease also. The disease gone, the doctor disappeared. He had no time to waste in mere personal friendships; and he

would not rob suffering humanity for his own selfish ends or private gratification. But, in truth, he had no want of these things, as we have seen; and therefore the renunciation, which would have cost many men much, cost him nothing. He went into no sort of society. "Art is long," he would say, in answer to remonstrances on the point, "and Science is longer still; but Life is terribly short."

"How can you pay so much attention to such a trifling malady?" an acquaintance had once asked him in reference to some very simple case of illness.

"In paying attention to trifling things," he answered, "the greatest truths have been stumbled upon. I may discover something that shall be an eternal boon to human nature by this scrupulous attention to trifles in which you find so much to ridicule."

He was a man of iron frame and iron will, and everything about him betokened

strength, power, and determination. In fashionable drawing-rooms and boudoirs he was unknown. "I have not time to change my gloves a dozen times a day," he answered, when a celebrated physician pointed out to him how large a fortune he might realise by settling in a fashionable quarter of the town. "I find men and women enough in the hospitals who require my care; the ladies and gentlemen are safer with you."

The fashionable physician had laughed a sleek, prosperous laugh, and perhaps in his heart of hearts agreed with the young enthusiast, who preferred studying science and making discoveries by hospital pallets, to sitting on satin couches and feeling the pulses of hysterical ladies.

It was impossible but that such a man should have a certain roughness of manner. He was never rude, never coarse, never personal; but he did not wrap-up his words in delicate tissue-paper, nor did

he polish his periods and disguise his real opinions beneath a flimsy veil of conventionality.

He had many friends; but they were all amongst the poorer, or more correctly speaking the poorest, of the toilers in the great city. Down by the river-side, among courts reeking with typhus, and alleys pestilential with small-pox and cholera, he walked fearlessly and unscathed. The poor toy-makers and watch-makers, the orange-women and street-hawkers, the working jewellers and small instrument-makers, they all knew him. Of these, and such as these, he never took a fee; yet none of them ever hesitated to send for him in their necessity, and no one of them ever experienced the slightest impatience, or the shadow of a shade of neglect at his hands.

He felt deeply the honour of his calling. He recognised the immense power that lay in his hands to alleviate the torments, the agonies, the weaknesses of suffering human-

ity. There was something god-like in this gift of healing; something elevating and inspiriting, yet serious, in the mighty responsibility laid upon him. He was not a religious man. He had but one love, one yearning, one joy, one hope, and that was in his calling.

Perhaps to him might be revealed a remedy for maladies looked upon hitherto as incurable. Perchance in his blind, yet eager, gropings he might stumble on some dark mass which should prove to hold the diamond he was seeking. Possibly, in his patient researches, in his untiring perseverance, a spark of divine truth should one day flash into sudden light, revealing to him a hidden treasure, the discovery of which should alleviate the sufferings or cure the diseases of all after-ages. Men of science knew and respected his name as a great authority. Himself they could scarcely be said to know, except in so far as a common object threw them together. His

own countrymen, the very men who had disclaimed and fought shy of him in the common Fatherland, began to speak of him with a certain pride, with the pride of possession, saying, "He also is one of us." For his part, he laughed at any such tribute; saying, that a prophet was always without honour in his own country; and that he therefore preferred the land of his adoption. Great men may say anything; and now that his star was in the ascendant, his fellow-countrymen did not quarrel with him for laughing at that Vaterland for which he once was eager to shed his warm young blood. Then, they would have handcuffed his skilful fingers, and imprisoned his science in a gloomy cell. Now?—but it is only the old story—*autres temps, autres mœurs*. Dr. Sternfels was successful, and he laughed; but how many of the unsuccessful are there not, whose curses are deep and bitter over similar wrongs?

It sometimes so happened that learned

professors coming from Germany, would bring letters of introduction to their distinguished countryman, or failing such letters, would present themselves at his door, sending in a card and some complimentary message. He whom they sought never refused them admittance. He would patiently carry them about with him to hospitals and dissecting rooms, to blind asylums and prisons and lunatic asylums, bearing with their helplessness, and acting willingly as their interpreter. But let them begin (as they generally would after a short time) to speak of politics, he immediately cut them short, declaring that he had no time for such matters, and that he was as ignorant of the subject as he was of the mysteries of stocking-knitting. Then, if pressed by his friends on the subject (with a want of tact not uncommon amongst those of their nation), he would laugh, saying with good-natured irony, "When I was a child, I spoke and thought and acted

as a child ; but now that I am a man, I have put away childish things."

"But, my dear sir, the liberties of the people—a united fatherland—consider the immense importance, &c. &c.—"

"Liberty," the Doctor would reply, "is a very good thing ; but *entre nous*, my most highly-estimated over-counsellor of medicine, I agree with Heine, and think that whilst we Englishmen love liberty like a lawful wife, and our fiery neighbours across the Channel as though she were a beautiful bride, you Germans love her as though she were but an old grandmother !"

Then his visitors would generally be silent, seeing that in revenge for their having expatriated him, the Doctor had come to look upon his adopted country as his own ; that is to say, that he preferred his step-mother to his step-fatherland, since the former left him at liberty, whereas the latter would fain have bound him fast in chains of misery and iron.

To such a man as this a wife would have been an encumbrance. He could not have served two mistresses; he loved Science, and clave to her, finding that love all-sufficing.

Sterne says, that in pursuing his literary avocations he was always obliged to have some *Dulcinea* in his head—that “it harmonised his soul.” If Doctor Sternfels ever carried a lady in his head, it was from less romantic causes; and his mind’s eye did not see the fair-one’s charms, but only her maladies, only her physical defects, ailments, and infirmities; she was simply Case No. 3 in his memorandum-book, with something painful to be cured. He could not say, as Alfieri did of the Countess of Albany, “instead of proving, as other women have formerly done, a hindrance to me, she has given me a higher incentive than has ever yet been presented to me to pursue the path of duty.” Since that “impossible she” did not exist, nay, did not even flash

across his imagination as a "possibility" which might some day exist, and come to usurp the place of Science, and to replace labour with love.

If to labour be, as the old Latin proverb says it is, also to pray, then Dr. Sternfel's life was indeed a prayerful one. He scarcely rested from his labours day or night, and work was to him a sort of religion.

His youth had been a stormy one; but of his youth he never spoke, unless it might be in some caustic allusion to the follies that had then filled his brain. That much-abused word, 'liberty,' had caused most of his misfortunes. Young blood is easily intoxicated, and young heads feel quickly the fumes of strong drink. He was too full of energy, of life, of generous ardour and impulse, to sit down quietly and feel the pulses of village crones, or prescribe black draughts for beer-drinking boors, when his country was agitated by such violent throes as shook her to the very centre.

His mother—a proud, obstinate woman, then in the pride of life, and endowed with a beauty and spirit of which her son's energy and strength were but a later edition—had laid her commands upon the fiery youth, and had forbidden him to take part in any of the political demonstrations of the day. With her great glowing black eyes kindling ominously beneath the bent brows, she had warned him what the consequences of his disobedience would be. She had led his betrothed aside, and had talked and argued, threatened and denounced, till the timid shallow-natured girl had trembled before her, and then, bursting into torrents of helpless tears, had promised to do her bidding—to seek to win her lover from his wild visions, and to discourage in his aspirations the ardent young dreamer of dreams.

“See,” his mother had added, when, mollified by the girl's submission, she had thought fit somewhat to soften her tone—

“see, is there not food and raiment enough for all of us? and have we not flocks and herds on our farms, and goodly store of wheat and barley garnered into our barns? Have we not linen enough, and to spare, for the two households? and is not the pasture-farm there for thee and Max? And after the summer fair,” the mother had added, “there need be no further delay, Lina, and thou canst don the matron’s cap.”

Then Lina had blushed; but she wept no more, and knitted the tears that had already fallen from her bright blue eyes into the stocking over which she was busy.

Later that evening, as the mother and future daughter-in-law sat by the stove, the dark-eyed, imperious elder woman began again on the subject which, while it irritated her, she seemed never able to let alone.

“See, Lina,” she said, “how foolish Max is.” His betrothed dared not dissent

openly from this opinion, though in her heart she resented the words bitterly. "I married his father at eighteen; at twenty-two I was a widow. I have farmed the land myself, and have spun and laid-by linen and gold. I have never thought of marrying again. I have lived for my son. And now my son is ungrateful to me; he is disobedient and rebellious, and does not listen to my words. I have had suitors enough," she continued proudly; "but I have never smiled on one of them. Some of them told me that it was for love of my bright eyes that they wooed me; but I knew that my bright eyes, without money and lands to back them, would never have given them a heart-ache. Others, more sincere,—or, perhaps, more courageous,—pointed out how advantageous it would be for both parties that our lands should be joined. 'I have had one husband for love,' I said to them; 'and I will never take another for money.' And so I have kept faith-

ful to my Max's memory, and done my duty by his child."

The knitting-needles clicked, and there was a pause in the dimly-lighted room; for Lina held her future mother-in-law in great awe, and scarcely knew what to say.

"Why is Max so unlike his father?" the angry mother went on. "I ask thee, what does he mean? Is it natural that he should leave his betrothed to go away for months at a time to the towns? To study medicine, forsooth! As if people have not been dying from the beginning of the world, and will go on dying to the end of it, in spite of all the science, and the universities, and the discoveries, and inventions, and charlatans, and quacks! He who cannot be cured by herbs and fasting, by pure water and fresh air, by good milk and wholesome food, and early hours and a quiet conscience, will never be cured. But it is simply a pretext. He wishes to be a fine gentleman; he scorns to follow the plough; he despises

the station in which God has placed him ; and he keeps his hands white in kid gloves, and wears town-made clothes ! I ask thee," pursued the angry woman, "is it at all likely that he loves thee ? Should he not prefer thy society to all else in the world ? My Max would have shared the hardest lot with me rather than the grandest with any other woman ; and is the lot so hard that his son would have with thee, my niece ? But my patience is at an end. When he comes we will open a new chapter ; and all the worse for him if the story that we then read be not a pleasant one."

When Max came home, fresh reproaches, new accusations, more tyrannical orders, awaited him from his mother. He should leave the university ; he should cut his old friends ; his voice should be heard no more in the debating clubs ; he should resign the profession he had chosen ; he should come home and till the ground, and watch the flocks and herds, and marry Lina, and lead

a life of pastoral delight—or—Ah! foolish mother! could you not see that all the energy, all the pride, all the decision of the heart you were trying to quell, would rise up in bitter rebellion against threats?—or she would disinherit him, she would curse him, and the land which had been his forefathers' should go to a stranger, and an alien should reap the harvests from the fertile fields!

On the one side, everything to gain; on the other, nothing to lose. But every generous heart will sacrifice self-interest to noble impulses. Max had looked at his mother for an instant in silence, and whilst so looking, his face hardened and darkened, and his final resolution was taken. Yet even then he looked at her with an admiration that took the place of anguish, or tenderness, or remorse. "What a grand woman she is!" he thought to himself, whilst her black eyes were flashing fire; "but she belongs to another generation."

Then he had left her, and sought consolation with his betrothed. Lina was spinning. At first she was silent, then cross, then coy, and finally, being of too simple a nature to carry on any fine strategy, she burst into tears, and began to reproach her lover so violently and so indiscriminately, that Max attempted no refutation, but simply gazed on her with wonder. By degrees he began half-chidingly to coax her, as one coaxes some angry child, but she repelled his caresses.

“Thou dost not love me,” she sobbed; “thy mother says so. Thou apest the fine gentleman, and despisest the simple girl who knows none of the arts of thy town dames. Thou art a rebel, and disloyal to thy sovereign; thou goest with base men, and art never seen at church; thou talkest seditious talk, and art the companion of vagabonds; thou art an ungrateful son, and a faithless lover.”

Alas, poor Lina! Here were two women,

both loving the same man in different ways, but with equal intensity; and yet they neither of them had the wit to see that they were driving him to do the very deeds they most apprehended and condemned. All Lina's little self-love had been wounded by the mother's taunts, and the sting was still there pricking her on to unreasonable anger.

"Lina," said Max, very gravely, "you are angry now, but still you know that you are unjust and untrue. I have loved you, and you only; but the beginning and end of a man's life is not fulfilled in this" (he did not say Alpha and Omega—he wished the poor, angry, simple girl to understand every word). "I have other aspirations and a nobler ambition than vegetating among pigs and sheep. Wilt thou share my hopes? Wilt thou sympathise in my ambition? Shall we be one soul as well as one flesh? Canst thou set aside thyself for a greater object and a grander aim than thy personal ease and content? Then,

Lina, thou shalt never have cause to say, I do not love thee. Nay, thou thyself wilt love me more for that worldly interests could not sway my convictions from east to west, from north to south. See, Lina! my mother is hard upon me; thou must soften her. Thou art gentle and tender, thou must be the bond of union between us, and my consolation in the dark hour."

But Lina made no answer. Half of what he had said she had not understood; to the other half she had not listened. She was still smarting under the sense of her own troubles, and had no sympathy for those of her lover. She thought, to use a familiar expression, that "it served him right;" and in her stupid little head she made up her mind not to smile upon him until he had begged her pardon.

But to beg her pardon was not a part of Max's programme. He knew his Virgil; but all the rural delights of all the ancients and moderns would not have tempted him

to relinquish the path he had chosen. Bucolic pastimes and pastoral pleasures had no attractions for him ; and whilst Phyllis was accusing him of being a faithless swain, Corydon was laying down the law to her in a quasi-marital manner, irritating in the extreme to the weeping shepherdess.

Disappointed and chilled, he left her to the enjoyment of her sulks, and had gone out, and crossed the wood at the back of the house, and climbed the hill to the next village. There, with the schoolmaster, the publican, two tailors, and a clockmaker, he had soothed his angry soul with music ; and had returned home by moonlight in a philosophic frame of mind, which he had sworn to himself nothing should more disturb.

The next day was Sunday. Lina had dressed herself with extra care ; she was cheerful, even gay, meaning Max to see that it was not her intention to wear the willow on his account. But Max felt that a

momentous period of his life had come, and Lina's blue eyes and silky plaits were less attractive to him than on former occasions. He was deep in thought, and in no wise disposed to dance now to her piping. They all went to church together; but there was no gay talk on the road, either going or coming. Lina saw there was something seriously amiss, and began to be frightened; whilst the elder woman strode on before the young couple, neither looking to the right nor to the left, and, it is to be feared, in anything but a pious frame of mind.

At length, after the mid-day meal, "Whither didst thou go yesterday evening, my son?" she said.

"To the schoolmaster's, on the heights, mother."

"And whom didst thou meet there?"

"The usual Saturday-evening club, and Bender the clockmaker."

"Didst thou too play? or hast thou formed an audience to their folly?"

This was said in a sharp bitter tone.

"I took the first violin in two pieces, mother; but I am somewhat out of practice, and my arm ached; so I resigned my place to the younger Markworth."

"And talked to the republican Bender."

"Yes, I talked to Bender, certainly," replied Max; "he is an honest, upright soul, true to the core, and knowing many things that learned men might be glad to know." He did not notice the harsh adjective that his mother had made use of, but he spoke decidedly, and perhaps with a meaning in his tone beyond the mere words.

But the text was already there for what was to follow.

"Max," said his mother, "hast thou decided? Hast thou reflected on what I yesterday said to thee? Wilt thou return to thy duty and obedience as a son? or wilt thou continue to defy me, and go headlong to destruction? Shall I welcome thee as the master here? or shall I see thee

go forth a stranger and an alien ? Speak ;
hast thou decided ?”

“ I have.”

“ And that decision is—”

“ To devote myself heart and soul to
my profession.”

“ Thou defiest me ? Remember, I have
power.”

“ Do not abuse it, mother.”

“ Is it thy last word ?”

“ My last.”

“ Then—” she began in a harsh metallic
voice, but suddenly stopped. She would
not let loose the whole fury of her denun-
ciation on him yet. She had other wea-
pons still unused. She would try ridicule.

“ Thou thinkest to become a fine gentle-
man, to wear grand clothes—who knows ?
orders and titles and decorations, perhaps ;
to forget the honest bread which nourished
thee, and the honest sweat that stood on
thy father’s brow. Thou wilt never be one
of them ; do what thou mayst, they will

look down upon thee in spite of thy fine linen and soft words."

"I am not afraid of that, mother."

"Then thou deniest it not ; thou dreamest to become a gentleman?"

"I certainly do *not* dream of becoming a clodhopper—"

Then that interrupted sentence had been completed, and horrible words rang in the young man's ears, and reëchoed in his breast, as he walked away down the hills that golden summer evening, an outcast and a wanderer.

His farewells with Lina had been brief and somewhat cold ; for, to tell the truth, the girl's love was weak, compared with the awe she felt of her aunt. Max, too, was chilled. He found out that blue eyes and red lips, though very agreeable things in their way, were not altogether consolatory in the hour of trial and wrath. He wanted something more than this ; but he instinctively felt that what he wanted Lina could not give

him, and he was too reasonable to be angry with her on that account. He felt very kindly towards the blue eyes, and red lips, and sunny silken braids; and as he kissed her, and said good-bye, a warmer impulse had stirred him. He had taken her to his heart, and held her firmly there for a moment or two in silence; then he had released her, and had gone away. Yet once again he turned. "Lina," he said, "if ever you can feel with me, and have courage to share my lot, remember my heart is true, and only write me one word—I shall understand it."

But Lina had never written that word; and Dr. Sternfels sat in his gloomy study in Finsbury-circus as absorbed in his calculations as though the red lips and blue eyes had never existed.

Later there had come terrible rumours to the house upon the hill. There had been a rising amongst the students; Max had headed the demonstration. The ring-

leaders had been captured, had been tried, and sentenced to death, on the charge of high treason. Many of these young men, however, bore feigned names; was Max really among them? or was it Rumour, with her thousand tongues, that had given him his fate and place among the condemned?

We all know how the stone walls of prisons, and the iron bars of cruel cages, have miraculously opened and widened in stirring times. It may be that he had really been amongst the condemned, and had then escaped; or it may be that Rumour had spoken falsely, and that no such hairbreadth escape had been his.

With this part of his history we have nothing to do; and for himself, have we not already heard how, in reference to these things, he was wont to say, with his grave yet meaning smile, that the day for childish things was past, and the day for manly things had come?

Of the two women (who had each loved

him in her different way) news reached him from time to time. There had been a long period of unbroken silence, during which the mother never spoke her son's name, and Lina had not dared to ask any questions. During that time, Max Sternfels had been battling with life; silencing all suffering by the imposition of his iron will; enduring a thousand privations, bearing a thousand hardships; but never doubting, never despairing of ultimate success. And at length success had come to him—had come, not in the shape of brilliant saloons and *recherché* dinners; not in the smiles of lovely women in dazzling attire; not in the form of well-hung carriages and costly wines; but in the fact that his name stood high on the scroll of science, emblazoned there in beautiful letters of purple and gold, a glory and an honour for ever. Came to him in the knowledge that he had saved many a life by his patient skill, and that in future times (when his busy brain

should have ceased to throb, and he himself should be but a handful of dust) his name would live still on the lips and in the hearts of men, as one who had been a benefactor to his kind. Success had come to him. But still he worked on; for his was a noble ambition. All the yet unexplored paths of science lay before him, and his eye looked down the long vista with a courage, and a hope, and a determination, such as only generous hearts can know.

Government had more than once selected him (the stranger and the alien) to go on missions of inquiry and scrutiny. His labours had been rewarded by more than one appointment which hundreds of eager Englishmen had stood to fill: the pay was small, but the honour was great; and within fifteen years of the day he had first set foot on English ground, his name had become one "for all time" and for every country.

Success had come to him. It had not caused him to relax his efforts; it had not made him one whit less devoted to his profession; nor could it be said to have hardened his heart. His youth had not known much tenderness. His mother's fierce, imperious love, and Lina's feeble affection, had not made him happy; and he had come by degrees to regard happiness of the purely personal kind as impossible for him, and indeed—if the truth must be told—as a very negative good.

For years he had been kept by his poverty from looking (with any ulterior view) at the girls and women whom chance had thrown in his way; and the unceasing toil of his laborious life unfitted him for the task of making himself agreeable to the fair sex. Then also traditionary feelings of honour and faith to the silent Lina had had their weight, and he determined that his parting words must not be forgotten by him, when perhaps they were remembered

by her. So at length, when success came to him, he wrote to his mother, and, shortly afterwards, to Lina. To the latter he said (as was indeed the truth) that he had never forgotten her; and that if she could make up her mind to fulfil the promise she had once given him, and come and share his English home, that she should never find him ungrateful for the sacrifice she was willing to make. It must be confessed that the Doctor awaited his fair cousin's answer with considerable trepidation; but he had acted from conviction (as indeed he always did), and was prepared to abide by the result. At length the answer came. The direction was so quaint and helpless, had such an out-of-the-world air, and was so painfully elaborate, that Dr. Sternfels smiled involuntarily as he looked at it before breaking the huge dirty red seal on which the letters L. S. indicated his cousin's name. The address was as follows: "To Doctor Max Sternfels, Over-Counsellor of Medicine, In-

timate Referee of Chemistry, Extraordinary Inspector of Royal British Orthopædic Hospitals, &c. &c. &c. &c. &c., Wellborn, London." And lower down in a remote corner, in a very cramped writing (as though a hasty afterthought scarcely worthy of notice) stood the words, "750 Finsbury-circus." The letter ran as follows :

"DEAR COUSIN,—Thy letter gave me great pleasure; and believe me I am deeply sensible of the honour thou hast done me. But thou art a gentleman now, whereas I am but the simple girl I was, only not so young." ("I know that," said the prosaic matter-of-fact Doctor to himself, as he read the letter.) "But perhaps the simplest reason is the best to give for my answer to thy proposal. I am going to be married to miller's Franz next week. The miller is now an old man and requires rest; so Franz will take his father's place, and we shall nurse my father-in-law's declining

years. Thy mother is still hale and hearty, and but for the asthma would have nothing to complain of. The old house-dog is dead ; but we have a new breed of pigs, which are much admired. There have been many changes since thou left us. Hast thou ever met clockmaker Bender in London ? He left our village after the troublous times of 18—. But I will add no more. This letter was written (as thou mayest well see) on different days. Excuse my faulty writing. Thou knowest we have not much practice, and one does not grow cleverer with years.—Thy well-affectioned cousin,

“LINA.”

A feeling of intense relief had come over him. “One does not grow cleverer with years,” she had said ; and Max involuntarily indorsed the sentiment. He had done his duty, and now he met with his reward. “Let me see,” he said to himself ; “she must be two or three and thirty

by this time, and those stoves play the very deuce with a woman's complexion !”

Then he had written her a neat little note of congratulation, enclosing a very handsome sum as his *cadeau de nocces* for the bride, and saying many friendly things to the bridegroom.

I think it may be fairly said (without casting any undue imputations on the Doctor's gallantry), that he was very grateful to miller's Franz.





CHAPTER X.

HONORIA'S HOMILY.

THERE was one person who had not come forth to welcome Harold on his return, but of whose welcome he was, nevertheless, very sure. Almost his first inquiries had been for her; and immediately after breakfast on the day following his arrival, he announced his intention of paying her a visit, and asked his sisters whether they would accompany him.

“I will,” answered Honoria promptly—
“that is, I will go as far as the gate with you. It is so far on my road to Mrs. Goodman’s.”

“And why only as far as the gate?”

“Because I have not time to go in; grandmamma will enjoy you much better if she has you the first day all to herself.” (‘All to herself!’ what a favourite woman’s phrase it is!)

“Are you always so tremendously busy?” asked Harold, to whom his sister’s business-like tone, manners, and way of arranging things began already to be alarming.

“O, I’m not tremendously busy to-day; only you see I can be doing Mrs. Goodman a kindness by going on, and should be giving grandmamma no manner of pleasure by going in.”

When Honoria came down equipped for her walk, Harold was almost appalled by her appearance. She wore boots of a thickness, a bonnet of a fashion, and a cloak of a pattern, that dismayed him. Everything about Honoria was eminently practical; and, doubtless, her expedition

across country required garments of a special cut and character.

On her arm was a basket of no despicable dimensions. Not such an airy trifle of delicate wicker-work as one sees ticketed in the bazaars "For ladies visiting the sick," but a good stout osier market-basket, with a lid (which never fell off as other basket-lids are prone to do) and a strong handle, which handle, when the basket was very full and more than usually heavy, was apt to leave a great tender mark on Honoria's arm, of which, however, she never complained, and rather gloried in feeling the bruise. That purple and green stripe was as dear to her as any star or decoration to a young soldier could be; only that Honoria hid her stars and stripes beneath dowdy dresses, whereas young military men show their decorations with all the pride of conscious valour.

"Give my dear love to grandmamma," said Sibyl, who was standing in the hall

watching the gambols of her son with maternal pride, "and tell her if she's very good, I'll bring Bertie to see her."

"Bertie riding 'ossback, Bertie hunting of hares," said that young gentleman on hearing his name.

"Come, darling, kiss uncle Harold," said Sibyl, in ecstasies at the genius for equitation displayed by her son. But the 'darling' clung to his charger, saying, "Shoot him, uncle Harold. Him uggerly man." Upon the delivery of which piece of critical acumen his uncle laughed, and told the delighted mother to "let the little beggar alone."

"And he'll come home, and bring him tail behind him," shouted the little beggar, waving that of the rocking-horse in frantic career.

"Come," said Honoria, "we shall never get off at this rate."

"Let me take your basket. But isn't it rather—not for me, of course—but I

think I've seen lighter things of the kind," said Harold deprecatingly, as he looked at it before picking it up.

"It will be lighter coming home. But let me carry it; I am used to it, and really don't find it heavy."

"Nonsense, Honoria; as if I should let you carry such a machine as this, whilst I went empty-handed."

"You won't go near the fever," said Sibyl timidly, coming near the door.

"I have promised you that so often, Sibyl, that it is really silly and provoking of you to speak in that way."

"But think of Bertie and Sophia; Henry would never forgive me if they caught the fever."

"Henry can't expect Providence to make special exceptions in favour of his children," answered Honoria shortly; "but, leaving them entirely out of the question, I have Minnie and Winnie to think of."

Sibyl did not approve of her juvenile

portion of the family being "left entirely out of the question;" but she said nothing.

"Besides, I have promised mamma," added her sister after a pause, "and I hope you don't think me unprincipled enough to break my word?"

"Give my dear love to grandmamma, Harold," called Sibyl brightly after them as the two went down the drive together; "and tell her I shall expect a cup of tea at four o'clock."

Harold looked back and nodded pleasantly. "How pretty she is!" he said to Honoria.

"Yes; but it's a great pity she's so foolish about that child. It is completely spoilt, and will grow up odious to itself and every one else."

"I don't suppose any one ever is really odious to himself?"

"I don't know; but I should think if they saw that they were so to every one else, they must finally become so."

"My dear Honoria, what has become of Lindley Murray?"

"Never mind my grammar, Harold, if you know what I mean; that's all I care about."

"Well, Sibyl's folly is very pardonable, and also very pretty."

"That is just it. If she were ugly, no one would put up with all that dawdling and desultoriness," said Honoria, without the slightest idea of being unkind to her sister.

"Well, it's a woman's duty (and, I suppose, her pleasure too) to be pretty; for my part, I prefer the *dolce* to the *utile*."

"That's all very well in the abstract; but if you married a poor wife, you would perhaps change your mind. Sibyl has married a rich husband."

"I hope I may be as fortunate in my matrimonial venture," said Harold, who was thinking what a good fellow Somers was, and how happy Sibyl's rosy face looked.

“O Harold, you surely would not marry for money?”

“Who said so? But Sibyl did not marry for money. She could not have helped Somers being rich, if she had liked him ever so much; it was an agreeable detail.”

Honoria made no immediate reply. She had thought, during this walk, to question her brother somewhat more closely than was practicable in the general circle, as to his theology, and here was the time being frittered away in the most frivolous of small-talk. But it requires two to keep up a conversation; and if she abstained from answering his remarks, he too must soon become silent, and then it would be for her to take the field. She felt that her task was not altogether an easy one; but Honoria had a soul above buttons, and she scorned broad and easy ways with a consistent scorn that every action of her daily life exemplified. She was not (as

most young women of her age would have been) the least anxious to hear any of the brilliant details or gay gossip of such a life as had been his for the last four years. To her his success, in the social sense of the term, was a matter of utter indifference. She did not in the least care to know who had been singing at Berlin, or dancing at Vienna, when he was there; she felt no interest in the toilettes of the Grand Duchess of Saxe-Pumpenhein, nor in the Dowager Duchess's diamonds.

She might have walked with Harold for years, and never have dreamt of questioning him on such points as these. Had it been pretty Sibyl, she would have asked him a thousand details, would have found out all his love-affairs, would have sympathised in all his successes and reverses, and would have propounded a hundred-and-one questions about the Empress of Austria and the ex-Queen of Naples; about the divine Patti and the bewitching Lucca; about the

Prince Imperial of France and the Empress's hunting costumes; about that wonderful Princess on the wonderful horse; about that handsome German adjutant who had just shot himself for love of the *beaux yeux* of his too gracious sovereign (who herself, if rumour whispered truly, was a broken-hearted wife).

But Honoria's was a nobler curiosity and a higher anxiety. She wanted to test his orthodoxy, or to measure his heterodoxy. Such testings and measurings are neither easy nor, as a rule, are they agreeable; but as we have seen, Honoria scorned the easy, and disregarded the agreeable on principle; and having made up her mind, she only waited her opportunity.

They had passed out of the gate with a word of friendly recognition on Harold's part to the gardener's wife, and a donation of sundry small silver coins amongst the curly-headed brood about the house; and now they were walking towards Brookside

village, on the Wickham road, but in a contrary direction to the post-town. They had come to a turn of the road, and the church and village-green, surrounded by picturesque old gabled houses, was before them. The church stood on rising ground, and immediately in front of it was a magnificent old oak, beneath the shady branches of which stood the village stocks. A little to the right was the smithy; and above the smithy was the old glebe-house, a quaint gabled dwelling, with ancient carved oak porches and curious diamond-paned lattices. The windows were built out, forming picturesque variations and eccentricities of architecture pleasing to the eye. This ancient glebe-house acted as lodge to the rectory grounds, but was made use of in various ways, owing to certain rectorial family exigencies, as we shall presently see. The north side of the churchyard was bordered by some magnificent beeches, celebrated in all the country round as the

“Brookside Beeches;” and somewhat beyond the churchyard, at the east end of the enclosure, ran the sparkling brook which gave its name to the village. Harold was not of an enthusiastic disposition, nor was he prone at any time to much demonstration of what was passing within; he was, however, capable of long and lasting attachments, and of a faithfulness and steadfastness in some matters that almost savoured of obstinacy. Now, as the church and the smithy, where the forge was glowing brightly, and the hammer, falling on the anvil in regular cadence, resounded pleasantly through the wintry air, speaking of “labour,” as the churchyard spoke of “rest,” and the old familiar houses, and the great hollow oak-tree where he had so often played with Hodge and Piers in days gone by—met his gaze; now, when the old church-clock struck noon, and the children came rushing out of school with a whoop and view-halloo, a something seemed very soft about

his heart, and a mist rose for a moment before his eyes, not born of December fog. "It's the same dear old place," he said, speaking to himself: but Honoria caught the tone, and glanced at him quickly. Harold loved his home. He loved the very ground and stones of his native soil; and now he felt that it was good once again to be there. The air was very still, and the children's voices resounded pleasantly across the churchyard calm, and contrasted cheerfully with the autumnal decay around.

"Yes," said Honoria, "it's not much altered since you left;" and then again she paused. She did not want to catechise him, but yet she had something to say.

"Mr. Maxwell has gone, and is a great loss; but it was impossible he should stay after the manner in which Mrs. Pigot treated him." (Mr. Maxwell was a former curate, and Mrs. Pigot was the rector's wife.) "We are not so well off, now,"

continued Honoria. "But, Harold dear, do you ever go to church?"

"Do I ever go to church?" he repeated, surprised at the abruptness of the question. "Does your Christianity consist in suspecting every one else of heathenism, Honor?"

She felt for the moment a little abashed. "You know you might go to chapel," she said, after a moment; "and yet not be a heathen."

Harold laughed. "She is counting the curate's flock," he thought, and felt amused at her thus doing vicarious duty.

"Do I look like a Dissenter?"

"Dissenters don't all look exactly alike, I suppose."

"But which do you take me for—a Jew, Turk, Infidel, or Heretic?"

"I do not take you for any or either; but you need not be surprised or hurt at my asking the question."

"I am not in the least hurt, but very much surprised."

"I understood fashionable people seldom went to church," said Honoria, apologetically.

"I deny that: but I am not a fashionable person."

"I have been told that German Protestants are all Rationalists; and of course you would not go to a Roman Catholic chapel."

"That is by no means of course. You forget that all our embassies are provided with chaplains, who have such small flocks that any wandering sheep would soon be missed and brought back to the fold."

"O, Harold, I am so glad; I was afraid you despised such things."

"I am sorry you had so bad an opinion of me."

"I had no bad opinion; but I thought you might have been misled."

Something like a smile passed over Harold's face. "I'm not much of a saint," he said; "but I don't know that

I'm worse than other fellows; at any rate, I hope you won't find me so, Honor."

She might have said, she didn't know (and didn't care for) any "other fellows;" but repartee was not Honoria's forte. "It's the curate catechising by deputy," thought her brother, and refrained from comment.

They had now come to a sudden turn of the lane, and on the right hand side, bounded by a low stone wall, stood the house for which they were bound. It was a large irregular pile of building, of gray stone, with deep mullioned windows and quaint buttresses. The older part of the house was covered with ivy, and fronted the north; the east, upon which side ran the road, was approached by a gravelled path cut straight across a broad level lawn, on which the grass was, even now, smooth and fine as a green velvet carpet. Exactly opposite the gate was a quaintly carved stone porch, with stone benches inside; on the west side a dainty rose-garden; on the

south broad green terraces, which descended almost to the brook-side in soft regularity. Brook-end had formerly been a farmhouse, and had been added to from generation to generation, until, by degrees, spendthrift sons and fashionable daughters had made such inroads on the old estate, that the land had dwindled away, and only the gardens were left, so that finally the house had been sold for what it would fetch. Mr. Mildmay's mother had bought it. Sir John was dead, and Sir George reigned in his stead; and Lady Mildmay had elected to give up at once and unconditionally the reins of government to her successor and daughter-in-law, the present mistress of Mildmay Manor. She abdicated gracefully, and with dignity, yet no one could say that any envious haste had marked her movements; and it was observed that her daughter-in-law, though not given to hospitality in general, had shown her approval of the dowager's con-

duct by begging her to remain with them another week. But Lady Mildmay thought it wiser to adhere to her original plans, and departed; outwardly at peace, inwardly with a soul rent by a thousand old associations, which she felt she was leaving behind for ever. She might indeed come again, and find the old place unaltered; the trees unshorn of glory; the pictures in their accustomed places, the old servants still there; but she would be there as a visitor. It would no longer be her *home*; her own to do as she liked with; her voice could no longer be raised in command, nor be heard in reproof; the gardener would not come to her for orders, nor the clergyman's wife for subscriptions; the very school-children would not remember her in a year or two, when a younger generation should have cropped up in their stead; and she might pass through the lanes, and look in at the school-house, without either urchins or lassies recognising "my lady."

Lavinia was "my lady" now; and it behoved the dowager to make place for her daughter-in-law with what speed she could, and to show no pang in so doing.

Lady Mildmay had far too noble a soul to waste in petty regrets a feeling which was the echo of something deep and holy, hidden far away in the secret recesses of her brave heart. She had been brave all her life; and when the bitterest trial of all during a long life came upon her, it found her brave still, and able to meet the blow with a bearing that was at least outwardly serene. She had come to Brookside on a visit to her younger son, and Brook-end had about that time come to the hammer, upon which Lady Mildmay had bought it. She caused the great farm-yard to be filled up, levelled, and turfed over; she had all the outhouses and farm-buildings removed; she sent for her old gardener to come and lay-out her gardens for her; and then she wrote to Sir George, saying she should be

glad to have certain packing-cases, which were awaiting further orders at the Manor, forwarded to her, and apologising, with her usual courtesy, for the length of time which had passed before she had been able to relieve the house of her unsightly packages. So her household gods had come to her; and old books, and old pictures, and familiar furniture made a home, in which, sad though her soul had been since she saw them last, and heavy her heart, she could yet take delight. Thus the young Mildmays had known and loved her all their lives, and had come to look upon her as a friend to whom they could always apply without fear or hesitation in any emergency.

But Harold and Honoria are standing at the gate.

“Won’t you come in, Honoria?”

“No, thank you; I must make haste, or I shall be late for luncheon.”

“You cannot carry this heavy basket.”

“Have you found it so heavy?” said

she, smiling, and looking at him so kindly, that Harold was startled to see the momentary beauty of her expression. "You see I am used to it," she added, "and use is second nature. It is natural to me to carry a basket, and I am always at a loss when I find myself in the village without one."

"Well, as you will not come in, I suppose I must say good-bye till luncheon time."

"Give my love to grandmamma."

So Harold shut the gate behind him, and walked up the gravel path, and passed beneath the stone porch into the presence of 'grandmamma.'





CHAPTER XI.

A WINTER NOSEGAY.

BUT not into her immediate presence. Virginie took care of that. As he entered the hall, which was carpeted, and where a bright fire was blazing, Mademoiselle Virginie met him. (She had spied him from her bedroom window, and had watched the parley at the gate.) She now greeted him as he came into the house. “Bonjour, M’sieu ’Arl’d,” she said; “without doubt you desire to see miladi; mais miladi est très souffrante; which does not astonish one; for what times we have!”

Harold, who knew perfectly well that Mademoiselle Virginie considered it the

correct thing for Lady Mildmay to be aristocratically indisposed, took all this as a matter of course.

“I hope you are well, Mademoiselle Virginie,” he said. “You look blooming.”

“Monsieur is too complaisant; but I carry myself well *par le temps qu’il fait*.”

“I hope that my grandmother will be able to see me,” said Harold, after expressing his satisfaction at the favourable condition of Mademoiselle Virginie’s health. He knew all the little farce by heart, and that Virginie’s vanity required the tribute of a little flattery.

“Count on my services, M’sieu ’Arlld; I will announce your visit to miladi; and if she is not too suffering, I will return and bring you to her.”

But she was saved the trouble. A door at the further end of the hall opened, and Lady Mildmay, with a winter nosegay in her hand, and a clear healthy colour in her face, came towards them.

"I am so glad to see you looking so well," said Harold, after some time; and when the first greetings were over, they sat down to talk. "Mademoiselle Virginie was quite despondent about you. I thought you were in bed!"

"It is the old war; she is annoyed at my rude health. Only yesterday she was seriously angry with me because I was not to be persuaded to represent myself as 'very suffering' to the Hamiltons. 'Everything of most bourgeois' she called it, and seemed hurt at my saying I was very glad to think bourgeois health was proverbial; for that generally we country-folks imagined we absorbed all the health in the world. Upon which she replied, that to hear madam talk, one would think I had never been out of the provinces."

"One would call it impertinence in an Englishwoman."

"Perhaps so. But I prefer to give it the prettier name of attachment."

“Well, it is a sort of manifestation, of which I should highly disapprove in your place.”

“Ah, *mon cher* ! with age one learns patience.”

As she said these words, there was a slight melancholy in her tone. It was as though some distant chord reëchoing had produced the faint note of sadness. Harold looked up at her. He had always admired and loved her, but now a certain feeling, not altogether rare in youth, came to heighten the old love and admiration. There was the reverence that a noble life inspires ; the respect for sufferings, trials, experiences ; the awe for regrets which may never be uttered ; and also the regret itself, which strikes coldly and heavily on our hearts, when we realise that the noble gentle life is on the wane, and that we cannot hope to have it always with us. To me it always seems that elderly men and women, whose lives have been brave,

cheerful, active, and sincere, are like living sepulchres; one feels that a thousand sacred hopes and fears lie buried in these living tombs, and that there are sorrows and joys hidden away in the dark recesses of the soul, which may never be revealed. Many people carry about their ghosts with them. We may sit with our friends, and seem glad and careless in spite of the phantoms which haunt us. There are spectres which are so familiar, that we never dream of the possibility of banishing them. They live with us; rise up with us at morn, follow us through the day, lie down by our sides at night; are with us even when we sleep, in our dreams. Happy the man that is not so haunted; he can never have known what it is to regret.

Yet I would not seem to imply that Lady Mildmay was so haunted. Hers had been a life rich in experience, and full of change; she had seen much, felt much, and suffered much — because — she had loved

much. Yet she was cheerful with a noble cheerfulness; she was brave, because it was her nature to be brave; she was patient, because, although it was not her nature to be so, she had learnt that virtue, which Faust so heartily curses, in the school of adversity. She was a woman of large intelligence, of acute penetration, of grand manners and noble instincts. She was truthful, and yet reticent; she was playful, and yet serious; she was witty, but her wisdom was still greater than her wit. She was generous, but she was also just. She was proud, but with so courteous a pride that it could never wound. She was a woman of warm impulses and acute feeling, but yet the surface of her life had ever run smoothly, because of her powers of self-command. And then, lastly, she was a Frenchwoman. Not one of those elegant, trifling, charming butterflies, who wear the last fashions, repeat the last *canard*, laugh over the last *mot*, whisper the latest scandal

of their friends. No. The Reign of Terror had given the first colour to her impressions. We can guess what that colour had been. Her father, the Marquis de Lamarlière, was one of the first victims of that terrible reign. Her mother, young, beautiful, delicate, the sole of whose foot had scarcely been allowed to touch the ground, escaped from the awful city in the garb of a peasant-woman. The foster mother of her little girl (the real mother of Mademoiselle Virginie), dressing the beautiful little aristocrat in boy's clothes, got her beyond the barriers, and brought her to her mother. Then the two women had taken their children, and the weary march began. The good Thérèse had nothing to regret. She had wept for the father of her child a year ago, when fever had taken him from her; then the Marquise had sought with gentle words to console her; now it was her turn to be comforter; and, O, how often did her hearty voice call cheerily,

“Courage, madame ; nous voilà bientôt au but,” but in vain, during that weary journey ! The young widow saw only her husband’s dying eyes, heard only his farewell words, was possessed of no hope, but only of a dull leaden sort of fear, which made her walk on weary and footsore in obedience to Thérèse’s exhortations to courage. Her child scarcely awoke any emotion in her ; she was too stricken, too bewildered, too utterly crushed and terrorised, to be able to think or feel. She went forward like one in a dream, and let Thérèse take the child from her, and restore it again to her arms at will, without comment or remonstrance. At night they slept in barns and behind hayricks ; by day, they tramped wearily onwards ; seldom speaking even to each other, and exchanging only necessary words with any passers-by. To all questions Thérèse replied that her sister-in-law was going to join her husband in a distant part of the country, where he had

established himself as shoemaker, having lost the chief part of his *clientèle* at Paris. The Marquise never spoke, nor did she seem to hear Thérèse's ready histories. Sometimes, when suspicious glances were directed towards the silent suffering woman, who held her child so wearily and listlessly in her arms, never answering its prattle, nor smiling at it — as mothers, though never so weary, will do—the faithful peasant woman would conjure up a smile, and touching her forehead significantly, whilst glancing at her companion, she would say, “Mais oui, elle a été bien malade la pauvre Christine; et même elle est encore très épuisée; mais ça ira.” At the sound of these horribly familiar words her mistress would look at her with a stare of wonder, and a shudder of remembrance; and the two women would pursue their way, followed by the pity of their questioners.

It would be tedious to follow them through that weary journey; but Thérèse

felt that French ground was no longer safe for them, and pressed ever onwards. Thus they passed into Spain ; and there, after a time, found rest. The children kept them alive ; their thousand little wants and necessities, their health, their play, their dress must all be attended to ; they grew strong and brown under the warm southern sun ; and by degrees, by very faint degrees, the Marquise awoke from her dream of the past to recognise her duties in the present. She gave herself out as a needlewoman and embroideress, and sat working day and night at delicate fairy-like fabrics, which Thérèse took into the town to sell. The two children were sent to an old abbé, also a refugee, in order that they might not grow up entirely without instruction. Thérèse, indeed, remonstrated at Virginie sharing the education which was thus secured to the beautiful Clementine de Lamarlière, but the Marquise would have it so.

“Look, my friend,” she would say to the faithful woman ; “Virginie is Mademoiselle Clementine’s only companion ; it behoves me to see that she should be well educated. I am not fit society for my daughter ; I am too sad, too full of memories, too old for such as she. Let it be as I desire ; a good education never did any one harm ; and, besides, I doubt whether Monsieur L’Abbé is so very wise, after all.”

Thus the two girls grew up together. Year by year little additional luxuries came to beautify their humble abode ; the fine Spanish ladies became interested in the beautiful exile who worked for them so patiently, carrying out all the caprices their vanity could suggest with such skilful delicate fingers. By degrees it oozed out that she was of noble birth, and that her name was written on the most ancient scrolls of French history. Then they would fain have made advances to her, and have drawn out

some detailed account of past sufferings and experiences. But the Marquise received these efforts at intimacy with a gentle reserve, somewhat tinged with surprise, and so alarmed the gay Spanish *élégantes* by her *grand air* and serious gentle courtesy, that they soon abandoned the enterprise altogether.

Thus years passed on. When the room was closed in for the night during the long winter evenings, the Marquise and Thérèse would recount to the wondering girls histories of their own youth; traditions of loyalty and aristocratic prejudices, tales of chivalry, descriptions of the court, and the lovely, graceful, fascinating Queen Marie Antoinette; histories of fêtes and water-parties, of masquerades and comedies played in the open air, with princes and dukes for actors, and queens and duchesses for actresses; which stories, to the listening girls, sounded rather like fairy tales and legends

of romance, than stories out of real everyday life.

The Marquise de Lamarlière was a woman of character. When she awoke from that long stupor of leaden grief, and had come to recognise all that she had lost in the past, all that lay before her in the future, she recognised also that it was her duty to live, and—still more difficult task—to teach her young daughter how to live. “I must be father and mother both to her, Thérèse,” she would say, “and I must not let my own grief cast its gloomy shadow over her gay youth. Would her father be pleased with me if he could see me making his child unhappy? Have I not to replace him to her? She must never sigh and feel what she has lost, as I may do. And she must love her country. She must never forget France. Who knows? Perhaps some day the Bourbons may sit once more on the throne of their fathers, and the house of Lamarlière do loyal duty again.

She must be educated as befits her father's daughter, Thérèse, as becomes our child. And now that all fear of pursuit is over, we will sell some of the jewels that we brought with us; and the children shall be better dressed and better taught than they have been."

But when it came to music and dancing lessons, honest Thérèse had interfered. "Pardon, madame," she said; "what befits a Marquise does not befit her femme de chambre. Virginie may learn to speak her own tongue correctly, but I will not suffer her to place herself on a par with our young mistress. I am your servant, madame; but, before that, I am the girl's mother."

Her sturdy good sense gained the victory; and Mdlle. Virginie learnt, instead of music and singing, a deeper lesson as to the respect due to rank and blood, and a more entire devotion and submission to her young mistress.

Thus years passed by. No mention was ever made by the Marquise to her daughter of the terrible death by which her father had died; no allusion to the Reign of Terror ever passed her lips. She had conceived the notion that it was her duty to hide all from her daughter which could prematurely sadden her; and she was not a woman to break any resolution once made, or to neglect any duty once recognised.

But Thérèse, with all a true peasant's morbid love of tales of horror, was not so reticent. She would, in hushed whispers and with stealthy glances towards the door, entertain her two eager young hearers with stories of atrocities, and anecdotes of falsehood, betrayal, and execution (winding up always, however, with the somewhat inconsistent admonition, "*Pourtant, Mdlle, faut toujours aimer la France*"), which were quite in contradiction to her mistress's programme. Thus Clementine came to know

much and to guess more of the sad history of her mother's wedded life and early widowhood; and it was with some impatience she began to hear Thérèse's oft-repeated formula, "*Faut aimer la France tout de même, Mdlle ; faut toujours aimer sa patrie.*" But there was a change coming, and Clementine would soon cease to look upon that land of horrors as her own country.

An English regiment was quartered at San Jago. Day by day the drums and fifes sounded in the narrow Spanish streets, and day by day the visits of a young English officer at Madame de Lamarlière's house became more frequent. He had been the means of saving Clementine from a dangerous fall amongst some rocks in the neighbourhood of the town, whither she and Virginie had gone to gather some sweet-smelling flowers for the Marquise. The young officer had carried their baskets, and had assisted the limping girl home. The Marquise had thanked him courte-

ously, and the following day Arthur Mildmay called with a bouquet of the self-same flowers to inquire after the patient. The young people were often together; the Marquise, who looked on Clementine as a child, was glad that she should see a youth of such good manners and so distinguished an air.

“She will learn in this way to choose, when the time comes,” said the Marquise one evening to Thérèse. “Monsieur Mildmay is a gentleman; it is right that she should learn to be at ease in the society of such, whilst her heart is as yet too young to be disturbed.”

“Ah, madame,” said the acuter Thérèse, “our demoiselle is no longer a child. The birds do not ask their parents how to build their nests!”

“Time enough for that, my good Thérèse.”

“Perhaps, madame; but to me it seems the time is already there.”

"You forget that our Clementine is not yet sixteen."

"I do not count by years, madame, but by looks. Fruits ripen quickly beneath a southern sun, and Mademoiselle Clementine it already taller than yourself."

"Madame, I love your daughter," said Arthur Mildmay to the astonished Marquise, a few nights later.

"You love my daughter? Then I am sorry for you, Monsieur; for she does not love you."

"Are you sure of that, madame?"

"If I am sure? but certainly I am sure! How can you ask me?"

"Because I hope that you may be mistaken."

"But there are things about which one is never mistaken."

"You must forgive me, if I say I think you still may be so."

"I am sure, because I am sure. There are things which carry conviction with

them. She is a child; she knows no one, goes nowhere, has seen nothing. She is happy in running through fields and gathering flowers. But why do I argue? for, enfin, c'est impossible, monsieur."

"Let me at least ask her in your presence whether she so totally disregards and so utterly rejects me? Or rather, let me tell her how dearly I love her."

"Excuse me, monsieur; she is a child, and I will not have her young mind disturbed. I am sorry for your disappointment, and acknowledge the honour you have done us; but the thing you desire is impossible."

As Arthur Mildmay went out he met old Thérèse.

"Allons," said she; "est-ce que le printemps est là? Faut toujours espérer même quand il fait mauvais temps, monsieur. Aujourd'hui la pluie, demain le soleil!"

Arthur felt comforted by the old woman's skilful sympathy and encouragement.

“Mdlle. Clementine sings no more,” she said a few days later, when she met him in the market-place. “She reminds me of the birds, who are always silent when they commence building their nests.”

Within three months from that time, Clementine de Lamarlière became Mrs. Mildmay. Arthur had pressed his suit so perseveringly; had been so patient and good-humoured under the Marquise’s rebuffs; had been such a pleasant, cheerful companion; had known so well how to add to the little joys and pleasures of the small household; had so won Thérèse’s heart by his *bel air*, and so impressed Virginie by his *manières distinguées*, that the Marquise had at last given in, and the young people were happy. It was true he had little besides his pay; but that was more than Clementine had been used to spend. The greatest pang of all to the Marquise lay, perhaps, in the thought that her beau-

tiful daughter, the last of the Lamarlières, should be marrying a plain English mister, with a younger son's scanty portion. She had in her romantic dreams always hoped that some Prince Wonderful with a "de" before his name would come to carry off her daughter to the land of her birth. But she gave in. She felt that she was ill, and began to be resigned to the marriage as the conviction stole upon her that Clementine would soon need another protector.

"Ah, mademoiselle," said old Thérèse, "I think we are all imbeciles. Here are we all bewitched by a son of perfidious Albion, whose barbarous tongue we cannot speak (Heaven be praised!), and whose only qualities are his air of distinction and his fine eyes."

"My daughter," said the old Abbé, "I am above narrow prejudices; but have you well reflected on what marriage with a

heretic means? And have you well considered his temporal position? For, enfin, ma fille, sans vouloir être trop mondaine, ‘on ne se marie pas pour des prunes.’”

As Clementine drove away on her marriage-day, Virginie stood crying on the steps behind the Marquise, who looked sadly ill and worn.

“*Fi donc*,” said old Thérèse, pushing her daughter; “does one cry, *sotte*, at a wedding, for example? Keep your tears for a better moment.” Then descending the steps, she put her head into the carriage. “*Au revoir, madame*,” she said; “I do not like that word *adieu*! You are now an English *miladi*; *pourtant faut pas oublier la patrie*. A *bientôt*, et *bon voyage*!”

A few months later, and Clementine was weeping for her mother with Thérèse and Virginie.

But now—ah, now!—she is standing before her grandson, Harold Mildmay, in the drawing-room at Brook-end, with a

winter nosegay in her hand, and is saying to him, in a tone of tender melancholy—
“With age one learns patience!”





CHAPTER XII.

ALONE.

IT was Christmas eve. The rain was pouring steadily down, and the streets were deserted. The flaring gas in the butchers' shops, the holly-crowned beef, the bunches of mistletoe and evergreens adorning the greengrocers' counters, found no purchasers; for the streets were empty, and none but those who were forced to do so ventured forth into the inclement weather.

Herr Bender sat in his gloomy little parlour before the dirty ashes of a coal fire, and felt desolate. His mind had travelled back to his childhood, and in fancy he saw once again the Christmas tree decked out with toys and gewgaws, with

wax-lights and bonbons; he heard the old familiar songs, the melodious Volkslieder, the simple joyful Christmas strains; he beheld the merry faces, the hearty interchange of good wishes, the delight of the happy children, the beaming satisfaction of the gratified mothers, the general merriment and good fellowship. "After all," he thought, "what have they here? The rich, to whom beef and mutton are no delicacies, have nothing, unless perhaps a little extra ennui at getting two Sundays in the week, and the bore of feeling that they are somehow out of their reckoning. The poor, the very poor, have worse than nothing; they have hunger and thirst, and cold and nakedness and misery, and perhaps a little gin, in which to drown their cares. The middle class, the respectable people, the grand citizens, they have — beef and plum-pudding, perhaps turkey too. We manage these things better in Germany, where every peasant has his little

festival, his burning taper, and his Christmas tree.—I wonder whether I shall ever see a German Christmas again ?” And Herr Bender poked his dusty little fire impatiently, and sighed, and fell back in his horse-hair arm-chair with something like a groan of desolation. But soon he was deep in his Newton again ; and forgot the beef and mutton, and the Christmas trees and tapers.

In the room above sat Grace Hepburn. She also was musing. A cloud was on her pure pale face, and her eyes looked gloomy. Was this dreariness never to end ? Would the time never come when gay laughter should sound in her ears ; when young voices should mingle with her own ; when some of the graces and beauties of life should be her portion also ? Was there never to be any change from the dull toil, and the bare bald existence, and the care that preyed at her heart ? Would her father never be well again ? Would he never walk in God’s sunlight rejoicing in

its warmth, in the hum of insects, in the song of birds, in the scent of the new-mown hay? Would it always be thus? Alas! no. The change, Grace, is coming; the change which shall make you look back to those days with passionate regret, as one who had eyes and saw not, and ears and heard not. The change is coming. But what a change! How gladly in those future days would you ransom one of these precious hours from the past, to call your own again! How often will you long, with an aching intensity of longing which knows that it can never be stilled or satisfied, for

“The touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still”!

As she sits by the fire and gazes into the living coals, she does not see that awful Presence, which passes noiselessly over the threshold, and sweeps that scarcely discernible and yet all too palpable veil over those sleeping features. No sound, no cold icy chill tells her of that presence; there is no

moan, no sigh, no waving of hands in farewell, no agonised leave-taking. All is still. So still that the utter silence even strikes the self-absorbed girl. It becomes unbearable to her. She rises and strikes a light, and fetches down the little lamp and shades it, and then goes to her father's couch.

“How soundly he sleeps ! it is almost a pity to wake him ; and yet it is better ; the nights are so long and wearisome for him when he cannot sleep. Father !”

No answer. Yes, it is a pity to wake him. Such a pity that the Angel of Death has taken care it shall be otherwise. The night is long, but will not seem wearisome to him now.

“Father !” There was already a surprised, half-conscious, pleading terror in Grace's tones. “Father !” She knelt down beside him ; but the next moment conviction, and at the same time agonised resistance to that conviction, flashed upon her. He was not dead. No, he could not die !

Not thus, not so, not in this fashion; he was fainting; he had been very weak of late—she had left him without food too long.

“Herr Bender, will you go for Dr. Sternfels? My father is very ill, dangerously ill—perhaps dying!” A white scared figure standing at the door, with haggard dilated eyes and pale cheeks, gasped out these words in a tone which said all.

Out into the street, through the blinding rain, to the nearest cab-stand, and then on, on, as fast as driver and horse can take him on his errand of mercy. With a satisfaction that was infinitely calming, Bender remembered now that Dr. Sternfels had no family; that he would be at home, if the gloomy house in Finsbury could be so called. Other doctors were out of town, in the country, staying with their own or their wives' relations; but Sternfels had no wife, no relations, and never seemed to need a holiday. “I am sure of finding him,” he said to himself, as though to as-

sure himself more fully of the fact; "he will come with me at once."

Telling the driver to wait for him, he ran hastily up the steps, and pulled the bell. The door was opened by the doctor himself.

"Why, Bender!" he said, his face relaxing from its usual gravity, "who would have thought of your coming to be my Christ-kind?"

But the allusion to the customs of their own country passed by unheeded.

"You must come at once, doctor," he answered. "Miss Hepburn begs you to come; her father, she fears, is very ill—dying, perhaps."

"In one moment I shall be ready. Have you got a cab?"

"Yes."

"Then go out and fetch the policeman you will find at the corner of the square. I gave my people leave to go out. I must give him the house-key, lest I should not be at home when they return."

Bender went; and Dr. Sternfels, gathering some necessary medicines together, prepared to leave the house. There had been no exclamations of surprise or regret on his part, no waste of words; he provided for every emergency, and was ready when, two minutes later, Herr Bender and the policeman appeared at the door.

On the way the two men were very silent. The Doctor, never a great talker, was thinking of his patient; to Herr Bender it seemed that anything like conversation would impede their progress.

"When was he taken ill?" the physician had asked; and his companion told him of the sudden apparition at his parlour-door, and of Grace's terrified words—"perhaps dying!"

"I fear he is already dead," was Dr. Sternfels' answer; and then they drove on again in silence.

Before they reached the little house in Rostock-crescent Grace knew that all was

over; that the change had come; the great change—that he was dead.

When the Doctor entered the room, he saw at a glance that his presence (as a physician) there was useless. The two women had done all they could do; but they were now resting from their labours with the sad conviction that they were all in vain. Mrs. Boxer sat at the foot of the sofa, lamenting after the manner of her kind. Grace was kneeling with her face on her father's bosom, her arms round his neck, perfectly silent and motionless. She did not appear to notice it when the Doctor and Bender entered the room. There was a moment's pause, only broken by Mrs. Boxer's sobs and tears and somewhat noisy grief.

The Doctor went up to her, and, taking her out of the room, sternly checked her talk. "My good woman," he said, "if you are really sorry for what has happened, prove it by making yourself useful. Your lamentations will not bring my poor friend

to life again. You should show your affection for him by serving his daughter."

"Surely, sir, it's for her that I take on so; he's at rest, poor gentleman, and may be is thankful that he's recovered his sight, while we are repining that he don't take no notice of us."

But the Doctor had left her to her speculations on the landing, and had reëntered the chamber of death. He was not a man given to moral cowardice, as we have already seen; but as he stood there, waiting for some fitting words to come to him, he felt that his position was a painful and perplexing one. He had been by death-beds enough to make this no novel scene; but mostly there had been mothers or sisters for the young widow, daughters or husbands for the bereaved mothers to turn to: here, there was simply no one; neither kith nor kin. A sense of his own roughness, of his small experience of feminine ways and griefs, came very strongly upon

him. He regretted, perhaps for the first time in his life, that he had not a wife, or—better still—a sister, whom he could send to this sorrow-stricken girl; who would raise her in their arms and kiss her, and sympathise with her sorrow with a gentle, tender, womanly sympathy, showing itself by deeds rather than in words; by small silent services, and ready tactful help. Such tact and gentleness he felt were not his; and Grace was not a childish, appealing sort of girl, who would suggest petting and caresses to the mind as worthy modes of consolation. “Suppose she should cry dreadfully,” he thought to himself; “how am I to comfort her?” But in the midst of his perplexities he did not forget that he had a duty to perform. “Miss Hepburn!” he said, and came a step or two nearer the sofa; but she made no sign. “Miss Hepburn!” Still no answer. “I must try some other way,” he thought. “I must catch her attention—Grace!”

Upon this she raised her head, and, without moving her arm from about her father's neck, looked at him with fixed, dry, tearless eyes. He was perplexed, but he spoke again.

"You did not hear me the first time, and so I called you 'Grace.'"

"What is it that you want to say to me?"

"I want you to come here ; I have to speak to you ; you will be ill if you stay there any longer."

His tone was not sympathising, perhaps, but she felt that he meant kindly.

"I know all you have to say ; he is dead!" she answered.

"Yes," replied the Doctor quietly, "he is dead. But that was not what I had to say to you. I felt you knew that already."

"Yes ; I know it."

"Will you listen to me?"

"No, I cannot listen ; I do not care ; what does it matter ? He is dead!"

“But what if he would wish you to listen? What if I have a message from him?”

“Ah ! that is different.”

Then she bent down and rested her head on his bosom again, and kissed his lips and cheek and brow, her arms still locked about his neck.

“Come,” she said, rising suddenly from her knees ; “I am ready to hear what you have to say to me, since he wished it.”

He took her hand and led her to a seat. He was perplexed and sore troubled. All his instincts, as a quasi-misogynist, revolted at the thought of tears, and yet his knowledge as a physician led him ardently to desire them. But she was tearless ; and as he looked into her beautiful but stonily-rigid face, he felt that her nervous system had received a shock, such as is felt by the sufferer years and years after that shock has taken place.

“I would have told you this,” he said, “or told you that you must expect some-

thing of this kind some day, but he—Mr. Hepburn—your father—did not wish it. He thought it better you should not endure weeks, perhaps months, of useless anxiety.”

“O, how mistaken!”

“He charged me to tell you,” said Dr. Sternfels, not noticing the interruption, “that he was quite aware of his state, and prepared to die; also he wished me to say that which as a physician I conscientiously can do, that his death was painless, entirely without suffering, and,” he added, pausing for a moment, “as far as we can venture to speak in general terms of so great a mystery—unconscious.”

“And you knew it, and never told me?”

“I had no right to tell you. Perhaps, even if I had had the right, I should not have done so.”

“Do not let us speak of that now; I cannot bear it. Do not stay with me;

you cannot bring him to life again ; he is dead !”

She repeated these words in a heart-rending tone. He was dead. What could anything else matter ? What was all the world now to her ? A desert—a solitude. There, on the sofa, lay all that was left of him ; she was impatient to be alone with him again ; with him and her own thoughts. She did not cry nor think of crying ; but she felt she should be glad—glad ? no, she could never be that again ; but that it would be a relief to get Dr. Sternfels out of the room. He came between her and her father. She did not know him intimately—few persons did ; but she knew him quite well enough to feel that it behoved her to keep her feelings under control in his presence. She indistinctly felt this, but was for once wrong. Dr. Sternfels began to wish she would “give way.” He was a man, and in his masculine character deprecated tears ; but he was, before

all things, a physician, and in this capacity he saw that they were necessary to his patient's well-being. He wished that he could school that stubborn tongue of his to frame some touching phrase which should strike home to the grief-shocked heart. But he was wise enough to know that such words and turns of speech, in order to be effectual, must come spontaneously, and cannot be made. So he turned his thoughts to the practical side of things.

"I will do all that is necessary for you," he said, "respecting the funeral, for which your father gave me some months ago full instructions. I need not say, Miss Hepburn, how much I wish to help you and be of service. I should like to feel that I could aid you—could in some way replace—no, not replace—but, perhaps, do for you what he that is gone was accustomed to do."

He called her Miss Hepburn now that he had succeeded in fixing her attention, but his tone was kind.

As he spoke thus of her father's funeral (half-hoping to bring by this means the tears to her strangely-fixed eyes), for a moment a terrible gleam shot into them; it was a sudden storm of passion at his wanton cruelty. What! he could speak thus to her, in that room, in that presence! He saw the bitter anger and antagonism in her face, and understood the cause of it. That too died away again, and the same expressionless calm returned. Let the whole world be cruel now, what did it matter? if he would only go, and leave her alone with him. That was all she wanted. Then remembering the kind words of proffered help she tried to thank him.

"No one can replace him," she said; "no one, no one! But you are very kind. If you would only leave me alone, and not ask me anything. It is sure to be right, anything you do. And nothing can matter now—at least, I do not think it can, pro-

vided his wishes are carried out. Good-night!"

He was dismissed. He groped his way down the narrow stairs, very sore at heart. He had not expected to be of much use, but he felt that he had signally failed. Bender, who had withdrawn when the Doctor had returned, after banishing Mrs. Boxer, was waiting at the door of his little room. "How is she?" he whispered below his breath.

"She is very strange, quiet, and tearless. I wish she had some woman with her."

"Not Mrs. Boxer?"

"Well, I begin to think Mrs. Boxer even would be better than none. The fact is, men are useless in affliction."

"Does she cry very bitterly?"

"Not a tear."

Then they had gone together into the little room, and Dr. Sternfels had drunk a cup of Bender's long-neglected tea. They

spoke of the poor dead man upstairs, of his illness, and death, and burial, but they made no further reference to his daughter.

Meanwhile Grace knelt with her face against her father's, and her arms about his neck, and rebelled. She could not cry.

“O papa, papa, speak to me! O papa, say you feel my hand! You are not dead, papa; you would never go and leave me all alone!”

But in her heart of hearts she knew he was dead all the time, and his voice would never in this world answer hers again. Never, never, never, through all the dreary long years that were coming! through all the weary lengths of her solitary life, never, never, never! Every thought which had not been of him, rose up and reproached her now; every wish for change, every longing for other things, every vain repining. He would never press her hand again; never walk with her through the dusky squares in the summer

twilight; never tell her of his early life, never talk to her of her gentle mother again. Never, never again! She did not think of what the future might be without him. She simply felt that she would be alone, and that nothing henceforth could nearly touch her, nothing could matter. She had no one to please, no one to work for, no one to cheer, to nurse, to love, to tend. Let her make the most of the time that remained before—ah! why had she left him to speak to strangers, to strangers who could not feel what a precious boon the next few days must be? To Grace it seemed as though she had been mourning her father for years; as though a weary time had passed since he last spoke to her. Alas! a few hours ago, that very afternoon, they had talked long and cheerfully together. How was she to get through all her future life? Thus she knelt with her head on that silent heart, and felt that each moment was precious.

Where was he now? The spirit that a few short hours ago had communed with her own had floated away into eternity. She did not know where to seek him. And yet there was comfort, if comfort indeed there were any, in the cold clay. As long as she had that, she had something.

Thus Christmas morning dawned on the orphaned girl, still tearless and silent, with her arms about her father's neck, and her face set pale and rigid.

In another week even that was gone, to which in her tearless agony she had so clung. It seemed to her all through those long and silent days as though she were preparing for a second death. And when at last they came and took him from her, a merciful blank fell on her spirit, and the light went out in darkness.

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